

Tuesday, April 9, 2024
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Statement from the City of Navasota Regarding a Recent Municipal Court Case
Related to the Navasota Public Library**

NAVASOTA (April 9, 2024) – The City of Navasota is committed to upholding honesty and transparency for the residents it serves. In reference to a recent court case involving a former patron of the Navasota Public Library, the City would like to respond to certain allegations made against the City and its staff regarding this case. Not wanting to interfere with the judicial process, the City has until now refrained from commenting on the allegations made by former library patron Kaylee Morgan (also known as Kaylee Dawn Cooper and Kaylee Morgan Lammerts) until the Municipal Court Judge finalized the Court's decision regarding the case.

The City is proud to support the Navasota Public Library as a vital resource to the communities it serves by encouraging individuals of all ages and backgrounds to utilize its space, equipment, and materials for access to knowledge and needed services. The library continuously provides valuable programs and activities to enrich the quality of life for all library patrons. As such, the City has adopted rules and regulations that protect the use of the library facility and materials. These rules and regulations are intended to reflect the fact that the public library is a taxpayer funded service, and that all taxpayer funds should be managed as efficiently and transparently as possible.

The City's library ordinance establishes fees and fines for various items, including fines for overdue library materials. The intent of these fines is to provide for continuation of services, while ensuring use of library materials is not abused. When an individual completes an application for a library card at the Navasota Public Library, they are made aware of all rules and regulations related to the library, including potential fines for overdue or unreturned books. This application specifies the process that will occur if the patron fails to return library materials in a designated timeframe. The application also states it is the responsibility of the patron to ensure their correct mailing address is on file in the library's system. By completing and submitting a signed application for a library card, the patron acknowledges and agrees to these terms and conditions.

The Navasota Public Library ensures patrons are notified of overdue materials. This was true in the case of Ms. Morgan. After applying for and receiving a library card on March 17, 2023, Ms. Morgan checked out two books that were due to be returned to the library by March 31, 2023. When the books were not returned on time, two overdue notices were mailed to Ms. Morgan at the address she provided to the library in her March 2023 application for a library card.

On May 23, 2023, the Library Director directly emailed the following message to Ms. Morgan using the email address provided to the library at the time of the application for a library card:

“Good Afternoon! Were you able to locate the overdue books? Our system turns it over to the municipal court after so long and I’d hate for you to get charged extra once that happens. If you can return them this week, I can stall it.”

Ms. Morgan responded to the email on the same day at 4:57 pm, by stating:

“I’ll bring them by tomorrow!”

No books were returned immediately following this email communication. There was no attempt by the patron to request an extended timeframe to return the books, or communication about any hardships in being able to return the books.

Per the City’s library ordinance, once there has been no response to notices from the library and no action has been taken to resolve the matter, information regarding the outstanding items is then forwarded to the Navasota Municipal Court for action. Again, this process is outlined in the City’s library ordinance (Code of Ordinances 1.09.004 (b)) and acknowledged by each patron upon application and receipt of a library card. On May 3, 2023, Ms. Morgan was mailed a final overdue notice concerning the two late books noted above. This notice specifically informed Ms. Morgan these actions constitute a Class C Misdemeanor.

After exhausting efforts to have the books returned through emailed and mailed notices, the Library Director submitted a formal complaint about the two overdue books to the

Navasota Municipal Court on May 31, 2023. The next day, on June 1, 2023, the Court issued a summons to Kaylee Dawn Cooper to appear before the Municipal Court of the City of Navasota at 8:00 a.m. on Tuesday, June 20, 2023. This summons was mailed by regular mail, which was then returned “Return to Sender – Attempted – Not Known – Unable to Forward.” Additionally, the Court mailed the summons by certified mail, which was signed for on June 3rd or 8th by someone with the initials “C.L.”. This Initial Appearance Summons Notice stated that Cause No. 117260 was assigned to this case, which was a Violation of City Ordinance – Library with a fine amount of \$378.00. Ms. Morgan did not appear before the Court on June 20th for her arraignment/initial appearance.

Therefore, on August 10, 2023, the Court issued another Notice of Appearance to enter a plea on the charge for 8:00 a.m. on August 24, 2023. This notice stated that “Failure to enter a plea in person or in writing may result in a warrant for your arrest.” Ms. Morgan did not appear on August 24, 2023, for the second Appearance Notice, which resulted in the Court issuing Warrant #117260 on September 1, 2023, for failure to respond to the Court regarding Violation of City Ordinance – Library with a fine amount of \$569.40 and bond set at \$1,139.00. The same day the warrant was issued, the Municipal Court mailed a courtesy notice to Ms. Morgan notifying her of the warrant.

On September 25, 2023, 25 days after the warrant was issued and six months after the two books were due, the two books previously noted above were returned. Though the books were returned six months after the due date, Ms. Morgan still needed to resolve the pending case that had been filed in the Municipal Court on May 31, 2023. She chose to wait until March 28, 2024, a year after the books were due, to appear before the Court.

On March 28, 2024, Ms. Morgan appeared before the Navasota Municipal Judge and entered a plea of no contest, waived her right to a jury trial, and was found guilty by the Court for Violation of City Ordinance – Library. When Ms. Morgan appeared before the Navasota Municipal Judge on March 28, 2024, Ms. Morgan stated she would only pay \$20. After discussion with the Judge, Ms. Morgan was asked to consider making an offer to the Court to resolve the case in an amount between \$20 and \$500, to which Ms. Morgan did not respond. However, based on Ms. Morgan’s appearance and plea of no contest entered with the Court, the Navasota Municipal Judge lifted the warrant on April 2, 2024.

On April 5, 2024, in conjunction with an Order waiving the fine and costs, the Navasota Municipal Judge assessed a fine and costs/fees in the total amount of \$0.00. The original fine and costs/fees were \$569.40, which comprised of a Fine of \$205, Court Fee of \$62, Summons Fee of \$35, Restitution of \$62, Warrant Fee of \$50, Collection Agency Fee of \$131.40, Omnibase Reimbursement Fee of \$10, and State Fees of \$14. Following the issuance of this Order by the Municipal Judge on April 5, 2024, the amount owed by Ms. Morgan was reduced to \$0.00.

In the City of Navasota, the City Council establishes local regulations through the adoption of City codes and ordinances. City staff uphold and carry out the ordinances and policies adopted by City Council. If there is a desire by the residents of Navasota to see changes to any City ordinance, they are encouraged to communicate openly with staff and their elected officials. This should be a collaborative effort. City ordinances cannot be changed by discussions in the media or social media platforms.

In this case, the City staff involved did everything possible to resolve this issue to prevent it from escalating. It is unfortunate that the lack of communication or response from the library patron resulted in such an escalation. The City of Navasota is dedicated to building and maintaining trust with the residents of our community. Since the case was pending in Municipal Court up to this point, the City's ability to comment on these events has been extremely limited. The City trusts that the facts set forth above provide the public and other interested parties with a better and more complete understanding of this matter.

We are thankful to the residents of Navasota and all Navasota Public Library patrons for their continued support.

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