Reinforcing safety at public libraries with criminal history check policies

Libraries and many public-serving organizations conduct criminal history checks for employees. Some libraries run checks on all employees, while other libraries require checks for employees and volunteers who have regular and ongoing, unsupervised contact with children, or for employees who have access to money. Some libraries only run limited, local checks for employees.

**What are the issues?**

The types of criminal history checks vary, from simple, local name lookup to a more comprehensive review against multiple databases across the country. The cost of criminal history checks, ranging from $15 to $50 per person, increases the cost of library services. Indiana’s Public Libraries employ more than 4,400 employees and maintain various numbers of volunteers.

Most libraries use discretion in balancing safety with fair chance hiring practices (more on page 2). As public spaces, libraries are not permitted to discriminate against former offenders without cause and specific library board action.

**What is Indiana Library Federation’s position?**

Indiana Library Federation (ILF) supports adding public libraries to the list of eligible entities to utilize the Indiana State Police for criminal history checks and requiring that public libraries develop and maintain a criminal history check policy by December 31, 2020.

**What is the potential impact?**

Allowing public libraries to use the Indiana State Police for criminal history checks will help ensure the integrity of the criminal check process by providing the more thorough review. Requiring library boards to adopt a formal policy for criminal history checks will help ensure that the policy reflects the community’s needs and is reviewed on a regular basis.
Federal criminal history checks require finger printing for most thorough history checks across the U.S. and are also the most costly to organizations.

Expanded limited history checks run by Indiana State Police (ISP) check against multiple database checks, as well as other states and the IN Department of Child Services for substantiated cases of abuse or neglect in the case of Indiana K-12 schools.

Limited criminal history checks run by local law enforcement provide a basic name search, which may omit important information due to different names, spellings, etc.

About criminal history check practices

Many public libraries require criminal history checks for staff relative to the type of job. Most require checks for staff and regular volunteers whose scope of service involves children. Libraries most often use local law enforcement, contracted services, or their payroll companies to complete the check.

Many library staff work at multiple libraries and/or make regular visits to schools, child care centers, or other organizations that also require criminal history checks. Criminal history check information is restricted from being shared among organizations. Like schools, public libraries serve children; however, unlike schools, public libraries are not subject to the doctrine of in loco parentis. At the public library, parents are responsible for their children while participating in library services and programs.

Fair Chance Hiring and safety in libraries

Fair Chance Hiring policies aim to give people with minor, nonviolent, and offenses from youthful indiscretions, a second chance to meet the workforce needs of Indiana. To that end, Governor Holcomb issued Executive Order 17-15 in part to help those with a criminal record rejoin the workforce.

Some libraries partner with community corrections for former offenders to complete landscaping and facility-related tasks. This collaboration provides residents valuable work experience and stewards taxpayer funds. As a best practice in human resources administration, library policies allow discretion related to the type and date of offense specific to the type of job responsibilities.

Libraries Transform® Indiana

Indiana Library Federation believes that libraries, with all of their modern amenities and innovations, are a smart investment, with the potential to transform communities and create a passion for lifelong learning.

Our approach to advocacy

• Indiana Library Federation is a statewide nonprofit association that is dedicated to advancing library services for the benefit of Indiana residents.

• Indiana Library Federation is nonpartisan and reflects the core values of the library field, including lifelong learning, freedom of ideas and civil discourse.

• Indiana Library Federation monitors public policies that affect all types of libraries and the people who work in and support them. ILF engages its members and stakeholders to be positioned for action in library advocacy.

Indiana’s public libraries by the numbers*

236 public libraries  426 library branches  25 bookmobiles  85,016 children's programs  2,186,889 children's program attendance  13,474 young adult programs  149,778 total programs  3,280,838 total program attendance  30,836,051 total library visits per year