



## Privacy of Library Records and Library Use

The Fitchburg Public Library and the Library Board support the principle of freedom of inquiry for all library patrons, and has adopted this policy to protect against the unwarranted invasion of personal privacy of library users. The Fitchburg Public Library and the Library Board also protect the privacy of library records and the confidentiality of patron use of the library as required by relevant laws.

All Fitchburg Public Library records which indicate the identity of library users are confidential. This confidentiality extends to any information sought or received, including library materials consulted or borrowed, database search records, information sought through staff interactions, registration records, Internet usage history, and all other personally identifiable uses of library materials, facilities or services.

Patrons are permitted to access their registration and circulation records only upon presentation of their library card or an acceptable photo ID. Corroborating identification may be required at the discretion of library staff. Circulation activity (titles, item information, due dates, hold information, charges or fees) will be given over the telephone only if the patron can correctly state their name, address, telephone number and library barcode number.

### Legal requirements

The relevant Wisconsin laws concerning the confidentiality of library records are Wisconsin Statutes Section 43.30 and the Wisconsin Personal Information Practices Act (Sections 19.62 to 19.80).

Under Section 43.30, library records which indicate the identity of any individual who borrows or uses the library's documents or other materials, resources or services may *only* be disclosed:

1. with the consent of the individual library user, or
2. by court order, or
3. to custodial parents or guardians of children under the age of 16, or
4. to persons acting within the scope of their duties in the administration of the library or library system, or
5. to other libraries (under certain circumstances) for interlibrary loan purposes [see ss. 43.30(2) and (3)].

Wisconsin's Personal Information Practices Act (Sections 19.62 to 19.80) requires all state and local government organizations (including public libraries) to develop procedures to protect the privacy of personal information kept by the organization. Libraries (and all other government organizations) are required to develop rules of conduct for employees involved in collecting, maintaining, using, and providing access to personally identifiable information. Libraries are also required to ensure that employees handling such records "know their duties and responsibilities relating to protecting personal privacy, including applicable state and federal laws."

Records indicating the identity of library users include a library user's name, physical image, library card number, social security number, telephone number, street address, post-office box number or 9-digit extended zip code.

Records held by the library that include personally identifiable information about library users may also contain information that must be provided to those who request that information, as required by Wisconsin's public records law. Personally identifiable information about library users must be redacted from any records that are publicly disclosed, except as the records are disclosed under one of the four exceptions provided by Section 43.30 (see above).

### **Rules to be followed by library staff**

1. As required by state law, library staff may only disclose library records indicating the identity of library users under the following conditions:
  - a) disclosure to staff members of the Fitchburg Public Library, and the staff of other libraries and library systems as necessary for the performance of their job duties.
  - b) disclosure as authorized by the individual library user
  - c) disclosure to custodial parents or guardians of children under the age of 16 [ss. 43.30(4)] (see below for handling of requests from custodial parents or guardians)
  - d) disclosure pursuant to court order (see below for handling of different types of court orders)
  - e) if someone's life or safety is at risk, library records may be released to appropriate individuals or officials without a court order<sup>1</sup>
2. Library staff must refer all requests for library records and all requests for information about particular library users to the library director or the library director's designee.
3. Library staff are not allowed to share information about use of library resources and services by identified library patrons except as necessary for the performance of their job duties.

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<sup>1</sup> The Attorney General's office opined, in a response dated November 27, 2006 to questions submitted by State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster, that "...if someone's life or safety is at risk, for example, if there was a child abduction at the library, the law would not require the police to obtain a court order before being allowed to view any relevant [surveillance] tapes."

## **Handling requests from custodial parents or guardians of children under the age of 16**

Requestor must be the child's "custodial parent," defined as any parent other than a parent who has been denied periods of physical placement with a child under s 767.24(4). The Library staff will:

1. request identification
2. if the requestor is the parent or guardian listed on the child's library record, or the requestor is a parent or guardian and resides at the same address as the child, the staff may provide the requested information

The Library staff will attempt to satisfy the request as soon as practicable and without unreasonable delay. In most cases this will be at the time of the request. If there is a question of the requester's guardianship, the staff person may delay the request until review by the Library Director and/or Library Board. If a request is denied by the Library staff, the requester can appeal in writing to the Library Board.

Normal photocopy/printing charges will be assessed to the requester for copies of records provided.

## **Handling of court orders**

[Note: All search warrants are court orders, but *not* all subpoenas are court orders. Library staff may not disclose library records in response to a subpoena that is not a court order if those records indicate the identity of library users.]

If a law enforcement officer (or anyone else) brings a subpoena<sup>2</sup> directing library staff to produce library records:

1. Notify the library director, or if the director is not available, notify the highest-ranking staff person on duty.
2. The library director or the highest-ranking staff person should ask the municipal attorney (or library counsel) to review the subpoena.
3. If the subpoena has any legal defects, require that the defects be cured before records are released.
4. If appropriate, ask legal counsel to draft a protective order to be submitted to the court keeping the requested information confidential and limiting its use to the particular case.
5. Follow legal counsel's advice for compliance with the subpoena.

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<sup>2</sup> A subpoena is a call to come before a court, and may include a direction to bring specified records. Not all subpoenas are court orders. Your municipal attorney (or library counsel) can determine if a particular subpoena is a court order. A subpoena normally indicates that a response is required within a certain number of days. Library staff may not disclose library records in response to a subpoena that is not a court order if those records indicate the identity of library users.

If law enforcement officers bring a court order in the form of a search warrant<sup>3</sup>:

1. A search warrant is executable immediately, unlike a subpoena. The law enforcement officers may begin a search of library records as soon as they enter the library.
2. Request that the law enforcement officers wait until the municipal attorney (or library counsel) is present before the search begins in order to allow counsel an opportunity to examine the search warrant and to assure that the search conforms to the terms of the search warrant. (The law enforcement officials are *not* required to accede to your request to delay the search.)
3. Cooperate with the search to ensure that only the records identified in the warrant are produced and that no other users' records are disclosed.

If FBI agents bring a court order in the form of a search warrant issued under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA)<sup>4</sup>:

1. A search warrant is executable immediately, unlike a subpoena. The law enforcement officers may begin a search of library records as soon as they enter the library.
2. Request that the law enforcement officers wait until the municipal attorney (or library counsel) is present before the search begins in order to allow counsel an opportunity to examine the search warrant and to assure that the search conforms to the terms of the search warrant. (The law enforcement officials are *not* required to accede to your request.)
3. Cooperate with the search to ensure that only the records identified in the warrant are produced and that no other users' records are disclosed.
4. It is illegal to disclose to any other person (other than those persons necessary to produce the tangible things sought in the warrant) that the Federal Bureau of Investigation has sought or obtained records or other items under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA).

*Approved by the Fitchburg Public Library Board on June 19, 2019*

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<sup>3</sup> A search warrant is a is an order signed by a judge directing a law enforcement officer to conduct a search of a designated person, a designated object or a designated place for the purpose of seizing designated property or kinds of property.

<sup>4</sup> The USA Patriot Act amended the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) to allow the FBI to apply for a court order requiring the "production of any tangible things (including books, records, papers, documents and other items) for an investigation to protect against international terrorism or clandestine intelligence activities, provided that such investigation of a United States person is not conducted solely upon the basis of activities protected by the first amendment..."