

RE: Public wifi use

From Sarah Crisler-Ruskey HARRISON <s.ruskey@harrison.lib.ms.us>

To lallywas@proton.me

Date Tuesday, August 1st, 2023 at 4:59 PM

Hi, Ms. Scheller,

I'm sorry I have been slow to get back to you. We have a lot going on with West Biloxi renovations about to start.

I understand your concerns about letting folks know. It is on my list to work on some signage so it's clear what the hours are.

As to the vandalism, in locations where we curtailed access (and where there were problems), this has diminished. It's a bit different from being able to pinpoint times at which checkouts may lead to materials not being returned or to them being returned damaged. There isn't a correlation between when items are checked out and potential damage to them, but there was a pretty clear correlation to a location being convenient for both wifi and illicit activities, with the wifi access making the location more desirable than another for choosing to do the other activities. Similarly, we have no reason to suspect that using the book drop encourages anyone to linger at the library in the way wifi does.

It's a risk of "doing business" to have lost and damaged items, but property damage, defecating on the property, urinating, and so forth start to become safety concerns, which are of another order.

Your concern about IDs is one that we wrestle with periodically. Managers asked for this because there were several instances of computers being damaged or stolen and of other severe behavior issues, so they requested that we ask for IDs so that we have some information (a name) if this happens. We also check this because we sometimes have to ban patrons who threaten staff or otherwise violate behavior policies in a severe way. If we don't ask for ID, we have had repeated issues with banned patrons coming in despite the ban and asking for a guest card (again a safety issue).

However, staff should also be passing along how folks can obtain **free** IDs if they don't have one. Anyone can go to the courthouse and get a free voter ID. They will look up your birth certificate to assist, and you don't have to have a fixed address. We accept those as IDs. There is a courthouse in Biloxi and in Gulfport.

As to the complex problem of how those without homes are perceived and treated, those who are behavior problems are not necessarily folks without a home. They come from all types of environments.

However, we do require all staff to do specialized training for empathizing with and serving the homeless that is done by a person who managed a shelter in Chicago. It is targeted specifically for the library environment and consists of several modules. We try to ensure that everyone has a good foundation to prevent bias and to encourage empathy. We don't always succeed: doing library work can be very rewarding, but it can also have days of difficult, even scary people and unpleasant interactions. I hope that the majority of the time we are presenting a welcoming and compassionate environment for all of our patrons.

Best,

Sarah Crisler-Ruskey

Sarah Crisler-Ruskey, Director

Harrison County Library System

12135 Old Hwy 49

Gulfport, MS 39503

228.539.0110 ext. 101

From: lallywas <lallywas@proton.me>
Sent: Thursday, July 27, 2023 5:28 PM
To: Sarah Crisler-Ruskey HARRISON <s.ruskey@harrison.lib.ms.us>
Subject: RE: Public wifi use

Thank you for your prompt response!

I was discussing my first letter with yet another homeless person in the area and his response was that "Well they won't get back to you... that's too much like permission!". My apologies if my earlier letter was unclear... my point is actually to communicate when the wifi access is allowed if at all... as rumored... to everyone. I agree with you that 24/7 access would be ideal... but I realize at many libraries with after hours access like Covington's there is a compromise.

I did not know there was 24 hour Biloxi public wifi and am sure some would appreciate the library letting them know where this access is looking forward to it myself.

I do not see however how vandals would be discouraged because of lacking the wifi access but if this is the reason it would sure affect many more potential patrons who are not vandals than whoever is really the culprit(s).

Put another way would this library restrict all all readers who came at a certain day or hour... or who browsed a particular resource (say books about mermaids) because that material/hour/day tended to turn up lost, damaged, or had not been returned? I am better accustomed to that they put such a frequently damaged material behind the desk awhile to better understand who is using it and how. Sometimes it helps I know to make each user actually request such resource.

This reminds, I am told the Biloxi Public Library requires identification to browse using the library's computers whilst under the supervision of nearby staff during library hours so that already puts at a disadvantage those without identification unless they possess their own mobile computer. However I guess you may be limited, I'm unfamiliar at this point with the legislation concerning ID in Mississippi but I wouldn't be surprised these days to find things that different from state to state.

As the guest passes are already printed during the day based upon ID... can they be requested during the day, picked up, and saved for after hours use with one of the same identification linked passes?

It may solve your questions about who is coming to the library at night over your wifi... but to resolve who is vandalizing I think that is a different question that addressing the wifi use isn't likely to really solve. Nor do I think

vandals must necessarily linger as would someone upon the internet... I believe the book drop is still open 24/7... is this correct?

Is there a reason in particular to suspect those who cannot afford home internet versus a patron who arrives too late in the evening to return a borrowed physical book during the same open hours?

<https://www.speakupmag.com/p/swollen-legs-and-the-homeless>

Regarding the homeless it is sad that most people do not understand edema due to constant walking and sitting... it reminds me most of how hazing works upon a student... not everyone recognizes the cause but the effect is real for the student. The social effects of being physically hazed can lead to suspicion that the student is not serious when that student is simply too abused to operate physically in the same way.

Put another way if any one of your patrons worked an under-paid physically demanding job either walking or driving between 10pm and 6am an eight hour shift... then came to your library to try to learn but sometimes fell asleep would you understand how motivated this patron was to come and risk judgement to try to struggle for a better life? Now imagine that this person isn't paid a cent... rather due to low economic status they must undergo such trials merely to satisfy wealthier authorities during these hours most every night... in the rest of their day they try to accomplish the same tasks we take for granted while housed. In their dreams they might wish to 'turn their lives around'... but fall asleep in the process of trying to live normally.

These too are likely at least some of your patrons. I have seen many people attempting to rest during the day about this town. I've seen few patrons in general at this library compared to Covington's. I think it is proper that staff does understand the difference between housed and un-housed patrons behavior is largely environmental. I did not learn this in my training... and I doubt it is standard library information. Nonetheless, this struggle once discussed is glaringly factual. If I spoke to people who didn't think the library would reply to an open inquiry my concern is that there may be people who do not feel welcome here during the day due to what they experience from others in the community each day, plus the rather unclear experience of after hours wifi... who it is on for... who it is not on for. Then there is distrust of police and fear of being blamed for something most marginalized people aren't exactly doing.

I think you can fix this perception for them. I will not likely be here long enough for that to happen, but if you do care... I am passing the word I heard on the street... on.

Best of luck to you!

Sincerely,

April F. Scheller

Sent with [Proton Mail](#) secure email.

----- Original Message -----

On Wednesday, July 26th, 2023 at 12:28 PM, Sarah Crisler-Ruskey HARRISON <s.ruskey@harrison.lib.ms.us> wrote:

Hi, Ms. Scheller,

I understand your concern for equitable access, and the library shares this goal.

We would ideally provide access 24 hours each day at all locations.

However, we have experienced repeated vandalism and similar issues at certain locations after hours and have limited wifi in those cases.

Downtown Biloxi wifi is available 24 hours per day.

I agree with your point that the information at locations where wifi is not available after hours should be better disseminated to users, and I will work with my staff on signage.

Sincerely,

Sarah Crisler-Ruskey

Sarah Crisler-Ruskey, Director

Harrison County Library System

12135 Old Hwy 49

Gulfport, MS 39503

228.539.0110 ext. 101

From: lallywas <lallywas@proton.me>

Sent: Tuesday, July 25, 2023 7:34 PM

To: Sarah Crisler-Ruskey HARRISON <s.ruskey@harrison.lib.ms.us>

Subject: Public wifi use

07-25-2023

To: Sarah Crisler-Ruskey Library Director

Hello this is an open inquiry concerning Biloxi Public Library attendance policy,

I have been told conflicting guidelines about your policy for public wifi use after hours of operation... I am just arrived from ST Tammany Parish in Louisiana where the public libraries advertise with visible signs that the wifi will remain on after hours until 10pm and patrons are encouraged to remain outside the library and in the parking lot browsing the internet and completing work. Sometimes people linger but the allowed time is at least clear and all encouraged to enjoy it.

Staff have both told me the wifi is on all night and people are welcome to use it... however some of these have also warned against appearing to loiter. Patrons also claim police have chased them away. I do not have direct experience.

Let me be clear... marginalized persons in this time of book ban revivals are challenged in library access. Fear has been weaponized to discourage the representation of marginalized identities. Whatever library policy is police should not randomly enforce. As far as the local situation I do not know urban myth from urban reality... I am new to this area but I have worked and volunteered as page and public computer assistant for a public library in the past, so I respect the importance of predictable rules particularly to those disenfranchised people who benefit from

public library access most but often feel least welcome to avail of the services promised the whole public. It should not be a mystery what is allowed.

I ask you please clear up for all your patrons what after-hours wifi use is in fact allowed by you that everyone may at least rest those times when the public had been explicitly permitted on the premises, regardless of the challenges any marginalized patrons might face elsewhere and at other times due to intolerance, censorship, or inequities they may face.

Thank you much and looking forward to your reply.

(By the way... I do not have all night to test the wifi but it is 7:28pm on Tuesday... and as I am emailing you then it is on right now.)

Sincerely,

April F. Scheller

Sent with [Proton Mail](#) secure email.