

## Action Item 3: Blocking Group for Member Fines

### Current Policy:

"Groups" in Evergreen are optional and may consist of at least one adult and any number of juveniles with one adult designated as the group lead. (A typical example is a parent with several children.) There are no current PINES policies directly related to blocking group members based on fines.

### Proposed Policy:

Billy Tripp, Director of Peach Public Libraries, proposes a new policy:

"Libraries may choose to block any/all individuals in a group when total group fines exceed a maximum bill level for the group (as determined by each library system). A group member may request ungrouping of his/her account at age 18 or when changes in guardianship can be documented (at that point, that member's block should be removed if his/her bills do not exceed the standard individual maximum threshold of \$10.00)."

Note from PINES staff: If this policy is approved, then PINES staff will investigate possibilities for automating this process. However, it is likely that blocking and unblocking of group members in these situations would need to be done manually by library staff.

### Survey Results:

The following summary is based on survey results from 39 PINES Subcommittee members and Directors representing 30 library systems. One question was asked:

#### Do you agree with this policy change?

#### Responses from Subcommittee Members:

	Responses	Percentage
Yes	15	68.2%
No	6	27.3%
Undecided	1	4.5%

**Responses from Directors who are not Subcommittee Members:**

	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	8	47.1%
No	7	41.2%
Undecided	2	11.7%

**Comments From People In Favor of the Change:**

- After asking staff input, 4 were for this change and 1 was against it. Most staff felt that this would make blocking more equal since the parent is the signing and responsible party. They felt that parents with other minors' cards under their name with possible large accumulative fees were given rights not allowed an individual with only one card under their name. The one staff member against the change felt that there might be extenuating circumstances with groups such as home schooled children.
- As long as this is up to the individual systems, I have no problem with it although I would prefer a PINES wide maximum bill level set. We have people who use all the surrounding PINES systems around us, and it is always helpful to know what their policy is.
- Does Evergreen (or can it) give any alert when a patron is close to reaching 18 years old (similar to the alert given when a patron's expiration date approaches)? I almost think an alert would be more helpful than automatic unblocking as it would alert staff to update the patron's record and record alternate ID information.
- I would like to see some uniformity as to what the amount would be that would block a group. I'm not sure that it will be an effective policy if each system sets the threshold.
- Parents should be required to have their own accounts before signing up children. I am of the opinion that juvenile accounts should be grouped to parent accounts for billing purposes. I am also of the opinion that the maximum bill level for the group should be no lower than \$10 but not more than \$20. The maximum bill level for the group should not be an amount that makes it difficult for the group lead to resolve the debt under normal circumstances. To view a group's total billing you open up on group member account and add their bills owed to the dollar amount shown on the group tab. When signing up an adult the 'Is Group Lead Account' should be checked because all adult accounts essentially are in their own group.
- This is what I had in mind in response to the first proposal. Library management can better assess the patron's circumstance and situation to determine whether blocking a group would be effective in an abuse case versus financial hardship, etc. where flexibility may be in order for young patrons' sake (computer access needed for school, etc.)
- This was the unanimous consensus among the managers at ARCPLS.
- We believe that any fines that were associated with the group member who wants to be removed from the group should be transferred to the parent/guardian's account, as the parent/guardian accepted responsibility for those fines in the creation of the group member's account.

- We have been grouping and blocking for awhile now. It has allowed us to have more fines paid and long overdue items returned.

#### **Comments From People Against the Change:**

- From a practical point of view (what we tell our patrons on the front lines), we are entering the realm of sub-clauses and muddy policies. If the locally-set maximum were, say, \$30: would one child accruing \$30 on their single account qualify for blocking any and all other associated accounts? In that case, the \$10 maximum per account policy is not modified; it is broken.
- I don't see how this policy change could be uniformly enforced.
- I think it would punish juveniles. Wait until parent's card comes up for renewal, then address.
- This policy change will hurt children.
- We have concerns that the system-by-system nature of the proposal will lead to more hassle for patrons and circulation staff than the potential benefits make worth it, especially if it would need to be done manually at the library or system level.
- "While the question of creating a PINES policy is up to the PINES Executive Committee, a similar question was posed to Marti Minor. The answer was published in the 2013 Legal Issues in Georgia's Public Libraries, 2nd edition:

Q12: May the library place a block on an entire family if the card of one family member is delinquent?

Library administrators should carefully consider policies regarding borrowing privileges for families. There is no obvious legal issue with a policy that results in all family members being blocked if one of the cards is delinquent. This is because borrowing library materials is a privilege, not a right. Legal concerns would arise if the library takes the additional step of trying to enforce collection efforts against the non-delinquent family member. Collection efforts should be focused solely on the signatory of the account.

From a general fairness perspective, a family policy such as that described above is troubling because an individual may be punished for the deeds of other members of the family over which he or she has no control. However, the library has a responsibility to the public as a whole to protect its collections and this includes the ability to prohibit abuse of borrowing privileges.

#### **Comments from People Who Are Undecided:**

- I like the ungrouping but don't care for the group blocking option.
- I would vote "Yes" if the problem of "unlinking" a child from a parent's card (when they turn 18) is not problematic in PINES. Sometimes in the past when we tried to do this, staff members had to ask for help from PINES Staff because there was a glitch in the system.
- While I do see the benefits of this proposal and I like the suggestion that a minor may ungroup after age 18 or if guardianship changes, I do feel that blocking the entire group

due to one member's outstanding fines (especially in a parent/situation) is not a good practice. Once again, punishing the child for the parent's behavior.