

## A Plan for Resumption of Library Services to Onondaga County

Executive Brief: The Onondaga County Public Library has been actively engaged in following and creating best practices in the public library profession in response to COVID-19. We are inspired by the efforts and integrity of our elected officials at state and local levels and have developed an advanced, nuanced, and progressive reopening plan which will incorporate best practices for safety of staff and patrons while still allowing for a high level of library service for all of the residents of Onondaga County. Ideal reopening procedures are based off of a six week reopening schedule from initial restart of government to open doors to the public. This plan includes cloth masks for all staff, breath guards at point of service, and restructured flow of foot traffic and pattern of work. With this aggressive schedule we are prepared to be among the first county employees back to work and to do so in a way that is both safe and which provides a high level of service to our public.

Libraries As Potential Vector: Libraries have a high potential as vectors for transmission of the coronavirus. The modern public library is a community hub and public education center. They remain one of the most popular and egalitarian public spaces and provide high levels of personally curated service tied to massive resources for education and entertainment. Libraries in the 21st century have moved well past basic transactional exchange of materials and into personally curated finding experiences and intellectual first responder support for public need at the individual level integrated into every community in our county.

Because libraries and librarians are intrinsically trusted and because they have been working to make the public library the community living room for decades of professional effort the potential for passing on the virus, particularly between social groups which would not normally intimately interact or have close contact through shared spaces. *It would be very possible for a high level professional to transmit the virus into the homeless population or vice versa at any number of our library locations.*

Paradigm Adjustment: For at least the last 20 years public libraries have been working to actively move away from transactional interactions wherein people come in, get a book (DVD, magazine, CD, etc.), walk out the door, then return 2-6 weeks later to return it and get another item, or not. The 21st century public library is a hub of public education and entertainment with programming and education for residents from birth to death. Public librarians today are trained and comfortable in a huge range of public information needs including basic law, business, child rearing, and health. People ask librarians about everything and trust them to find answers on anything. Public libraries are spaces where everyone can move about, socialize, and create their own space in a manner that best serves them.

NONE of that is acceptable anymore. We will be cancelling all programming, educational, cultural, and children's in person events at least until September. Librarians MUST work behind breathguards to protect them during the long often complicated interactions they have with the public. Library staff are not simply receiving a form or issuing a permit when they interact with

the public, they are engaging in long conversations to answer complicated questions and discover diverse resources.

Libraries must fundamentally change the way they work in our new COVID-present society. This is the skeleton of the plan as it stands currently but a higher level of granularity is available on any point upon request for clarification.

Pre-Opening Preparation: Library staff have been inspired by our elected public leadership and have been aggressively attacking the issues we see ahead of ourselves. We have submitted recs for breathguards for all OCPL City Libraries and are sourcing them for a number of the member libraries in the county. The intention is to have these at all points of service where staff provide face to face service to the public. All staff will be issued a cloth face mask and will be responsible for laundering them for their own protection (this has been agreed upon by Union representatives as acceptable best efforts by administration). ***It is essential that breathguards be in place prior to any reopening which will involve the public being physically present in the libraries.*** These are currently in process with purchasing however there is a lead time as materials come to vendors from manufacturers.

Staged Progressive Reopening: Library services can be among the first government services reopen to the public, so long as these services are opened up in a staged progressive manner. Per the Johns Hopkins Advice to Governors Report, best practice suggests that large institutions move in two week increments to allow for potential impacts and effects to become apparent. This report recommends a six week reopening process broken into three two week increments. Each of these stages integrates the levels of access of the prior stage and continue those services while providing progressively greater access to the library. These stages are:

- 1) No contact “curbside” pickup services, including concierge service as patrons get librarian selected blind bags of materials based on preferences and choices which they submit to the library (2 weeks, weeks 1-2)
- 2) Special population access only. The library will be open at different hours for a variety of special populations including: children/families, seniors and high risk populations, medical and first responder personnel. (2 weeks, weeks 3-4)
- 3) Limit access for the general public, library opening hours now include members of the general public but they remain limited to allow for library staff to be responsive to lessons learned each day and allow them to have time to intelligently respond with new workflows, traffic directions, or best practices accordingly. (2 weeks, weeks 5-6).

Library services resume as “normal” after these stages with a focus on staff and patron safety throughout.

Summary: There are a variety of stakeholders in regular conversation around these issues and what the best plan is moving forward. We currently have meetings twice a week with leaders from both within the system and from member directors for the libraries across the county. We are ready to move forward in a unified fashion and serve our public in a safe, supportive manner in these new realities.