

Statement to Worcester City Council

By the President of the Worcester Public Library Board of Directors

Re: Advocating for Safer Workplaces and Stronger Support for Library Staff

Good evening, Honorable Mayor, Councilors, City Manager Batista, and fellow citizens.

My name is (name redacted for ABC Student Competition), and I serve as President of the Worcester Public Library's Board of Directors.

Tonight, I urge immediate action that strengthens protection for the frontline workers of our city's libraries. Over the next few minutes, I will highlight key challenges, share solutions, and ask for your commitment to a safer, stronger library.

Let me begin with what brought us here.

On August 8th, a library staff member suffered a violent assault—struck in the head, without warning, by a skateboard thrown by a patron. He lost consciousness and required hospitalization. And by morning, every branch in our system shut its doors so we could ask a difficult question:

“How do we continue serving this city without endangering those who serve it?”

[Batista, 2024; Burton, 2024]

Sadly, this was not an isolated event.

This event was a symptom of a deeper issue facing libraries across the country—rising workplace violence, fueled by untreated mental health crises and systemic underfunding.

Nearly **70%** of urban library workers report **violent or aggressive behavior** from patrons [Urban Librarians Unite, 2022]. In social work or healthcare, trauma receives recognition and resources. In libraries, this behavior often goes unchecked.

Yet, the city demands our staff manage every responsibility:

- De-escalate confrontations
- Guide unhoused patrons toward services
- Tutor children, support job seekers, and offer tech help
- Navigate constant uncertainty about personal safety

Even so, our library professionals do not seek protection from the public—**they seek tools and systems that allow safe, dignified, and consistent service.**

And tonight, I call for **four immediate steps** this Council must implement to help our library staff:

1. **Deploy trained security personnel** across all branches
 - Prioritize professionals equipped with mental health and de-escalation skills [Batista, 2024]
2. **Embed full-time clinical social workers**
 - Place these staff members where they prevent crises from escalating and guide vulnerable patrons toward support
3. **Launch trauma-informed training** for all library employees
 - Equip our teams with strategies that reduce burnout and promote resilience
4. **Secure long-term operational funding**
 - Match resources with the public's growing need for access, staffing, and technology

These actions lay the foundation for a safer, more sustainable library system—one that serves the public without sacrificing the safety of **our** people.

Why does this matter to the people of Worcester?

Because the library operates as more than a building.

We create a lifeline by:

- **Welcoming** residents from every neighborhood
- **Offering** access to Wi-Fi, career help, and early literacy programs
- **Bridging** gaps for those experiencing housing instability or digital exclusion

Worcester residents trust the library with **their stories, their struggles, and their dreams.**

Therefore, we must repay that trust—by protecting the people who make this work possible.

In turn, our Board's charter clearly defines our responsibilities [City of Worcester, 2024]:

- **Ensure** a safe and well-staffed institution
- **Uphold** equal access to information and ideas
- **Safeguard** the library's physical and social infrastructure

Only with committed city leadership can we uphold these responsibilities.

And let us be clear—this is a national crisis.

Across the country, libraries face what researcher Brewster Kahle calls “*death by a thousand cuts*”—strangled by rising threats, shrinking budgets, and legislative hostility [Kahle, 2023].

But here in Worcester, we have a choice.

We can be the city that leads—not waits. The city that acts—not reacts.

And for all these reasons, Worcester must lead with conviction instead of caution.

We will not let our frontline workers suffer in silence.

We will not treat violence as “part of the job.”

We will invest in safety—because safe workers build strong communities.

Therefore, as President of the Worcester Public Library Board of Directors, I call for immediate action—authorize funding, expand critical resources, and safeguard those who serve Worcester every day.

Let us offer our staff not just words of thanks, but the support and protection they earn through their work.

Thank you for your time, your attention, and your commitment to the people who power our library. May Worcester always reflect the values of knowledge, equity, and safety for those who serve.