

Remarks by the President of the Worcester Public Library Board of Directors
May 8, 2025

Good evening, City Council Members,

My name is [Redacted for Student Competition], and I serve as President of the Worcester Public Library Board of Directors.

Thank you for allowing me to speak tonight on behalf of the Board and most importantly, its staff, patrons, and communities that rely on our libraries daily.

As a Board, we must ensure that our libraries remain safe, accessible spaces. To do this, we must set clear policies, uphold standards, and create conditions where our public service employees can thrive.

On August 8, a staff member was severely injured, hit in the head with a skateboard in a completely unprovoked attack.

This was not a **minor incident**.

He was knocked unconscious and rushed to the hospital.

The fear did not stop with him—it echoed through the rest of the team and Worcester’s seven branches.

This is not an isolated event.

Over the past year, libraries are noticing alarming trends:

- Nearly **7 in 10** library workers face **violence or aggression** at work₁
- Almost **9 in 10** workers feel under supported by leadership₁
- Employees report feeling anxious coming into work
- Employees have inclinations of leaving the profession entirely

Let me be clear, these statistics indicate a public safety issue, a mental health concern, and a city-wide crisis of care.

[What libraries represent – and why it matters]

Growing up, my mom and I walked to the library every Friday.

We’d open up a book, sit on the carpet, and explore new worlds together.

It was more than a habit—it was a ritual.

A place of safety, wonder, and possibility.

And that’s what our libraries **should** be.

- A place where children develop literacy skills
- Where newcomers build language skills and find pathways to employment
- Where everyone, no matter their background, feels like they belong

But none of that is possible if our staff feel unsafe.

[What we’re asking for – and why]

Instead of coming to you with complaints, we’d rather provide **solutions**.

We ask for:

- **Dedicated public safety support** during peak hours, especially at our busiest locations
- **Increased mental health resources** and trauma-informed care training for staff
- **Clear protocols** for managing disruptive or violent behavior
- **Funding** for physical improvements, like secure entry points and emergency communication systems
- **Leadership** that shows up, including hiring a qualified head librarian to guide their staff through comprehensive staff training, oversee safety protocols, and foster a strong sense of community

These requests are not about turning libraries into police stations.

These requests are about **protection, not punishment.**

We want to **ensure our staff have the resources** to perform their roles with confidence and feel supported by their administration.

[Why This Matters for Worcester]

We know the value libraries bring.

They're engines of learning, equity, and civic life.

Studies show that **every dollar invested in libraries returns up to five** in community value.²

But that value depends on the people who make it possible—

And right now, we are asking too much of them, with too little support.

Library workers are being asked to act as:

- Educators
- Social workers
- First responders
- Crisis managers

All without the training, resources, or safety net they deserve.

One staff member said:

"I've had a teen patron pull a gun on me. I still have nightmares about it two years later."

Another wrote:

"I didn't expect perfection. I just needed them to show up—and they didn't."

These aren't complaints.

They are **calls for help** from people who keep showing up anyway.

[Closing Remarks]

As a Board, we are committed to doing our part.

We have reviewed internal policies, added de-escalation training, and supported staff however we can.

But **we cannot do this alone.**

We need you, our partners in city leadership, to:

1. Fund safety upgrades

2. Champion staff wellness
3. Send a clear message that **Worcester's staff and libraries matter**

Let this moment be a turning point, not defined by what happened on August 8th, but by how we support those who make our libraries possible to build a stronger community moving forward. Thank you.

Sources:

1. <https://urbanlibrariansunite.org/ults/>
2. https://www.lrs.org/data-tools/public-libraries/return-on-investment/recent-studies/?utm_source=chatgpt.com