

Letter of Concern to FBI Regarding Threats of Violence in Libraries

During the Summer and Fall of 2022, threats directed to public and school libraries and library workers escalated, including the forced temporary closure of five public library systems due to bomb and shooting threats.

On September 27, the executive board of the American Library Association (ALA) transmitted a letter to FBI Director Christopher Wray expressing concerns about the threats directed to public and school libraries and library workers. According to library directors and local officials, there is no evidence at this time showing a direct connection between recent threats and opposition to library materials and programs. However, the letter to Director Wray does underscore the increasing threats of violence to libraries and library workers nationwide.

The full letter is printed below:

LETTER OF CONCERN TO FBI re: threats of violence in libraries: September 27, 2022

September 27, 2022

The Honorable Christopher A. Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20535

Dear Director Wray:

We, members of the executive board of the American Library Association (ALA), are writing to register our concern over threats that are being directed at public libraries and library workers. In the past two weeks, bombing or shooting threats forced the temporary closures of Hawaii State Public Library System, Salt Lake City Public Library System, the Denver Public Library, the Fort Worth Public Library and the Nashville Public Library.

The bombing and shooting threats in these five metropolitan libraries come on the heels of other threats to library workers in school and public libraries, who have been increasingly targeted by violent disruptions of programs and verbal threats of physical harm, as well as attacks on social media platforms over the past year. In addition to documented instances reported in the media in recent months, library workers are reporting to ALA that they are receiving direct threats. We are concerned that these threats, some of which include the disclosure of personal details and false and defamatory claims, may lead to actual violence towards library workers.

Given the seriousness and proliferation of these threats of violence and other acts of intimidation increasingly taking place in America's libraries, we are gravely concerned for the safety of library workers and the millions of Americans who visit libraries each day.

We appreciate your attention to our concern about these threats to libraries and library workers and ask that you initiate an investigation as to whether there is any connection among them.

Sincerely,

The Executive Board of the American Library Association

Cc: The Honorable Merrick Garland, Attorney General of the United States

The safety of library workers and patrons must be a priority. We encourage directors, supervisors and managers to review their institution's safety procedures with all staff so that everyone knows how to respond if they receive a threat or are threatened directly. In addition to notifying local law enforcement, we suggest filing a report with the FBI and reporting incidents to ALA at notify@ala.org (mailto:notify@ala.org). All reports to ALA will be treated confidentially. We also recommend that institutions review their protocols for responding to the media in the event of such emergencies.

ALA is tracking these incidents on behalf of the profession and libraries as an institution. We need data to be able to accurately describe what is happening, work with actual first responders on addressing threats, urge official action on behalf of libraries, and provide affected libraries with suggestions and helpful resources.