

A Brief History

We have been organizing for a long time, establishing our Union. We have been affiliated with Communications Workers of America and AFL-CIO since late 2022. Our local, CWA 7799, represents public workers across Colorado - including Denver Public Library Workers United, Defenders Union of Colorado, United Health Care Workers United, United Campus Workers, and Denver Health Workers United.

We are public workers for the public good. Colorado works because we do. We are a wall-to-wall Union, representing every department with permissions extended to all workers below the assistant director positions, including lower management positions.

Our Union went public in 2023, close to the time that public worker protections were discussed in the Colorado Senate. We gained more rights to unionize in July of 2024 thanks to the passing of Senate Bill 23-111.

We're happy to host this event with our community to discuss problems in the Pikes Peak Library District. The views of our workers are presented via our workers, and the views of others presenting and speaking today are their own.

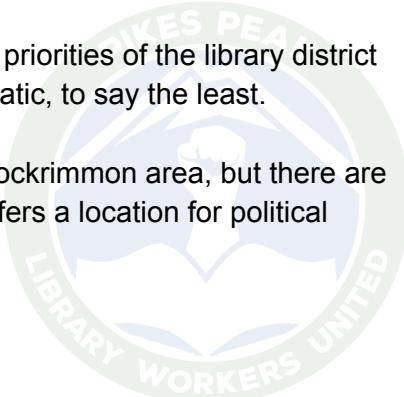
Thank you for being here, and welcome to the Workers State of the Library event.

Welcome to the Workers' State of the Library address. Thank you for coming. Again, I'm Jacob Ward, the president of Pikes Peak Library Workers United. I hope this will give you some insight into the way the Pikes Peak Library District works from the inside.

I'll let you know - the library only works because we, the workers, do, and because of the support of the community and library patrons.

There are problems. Transparency, the way money is spent, the priorities of the library district leadership, and the way workers are treated have been problematic, to say the least.

As a quick note - we wanted to hold this meeting closer to the Rockrimmon area, but there are no public meeting areas there. The library is the only one that offers a location for political events, which this has apparently become.



Let's start with some communication and transparency problems.

There have been problems involving communication around library closures from the start. In May, the Rockrimmon Friends of the Library heard about the possibility of the closure prior to other members of the public.

In June, the preliminary Facilities Master Plan was shown to those attending the Board Meeting at the Monument Library. I watched as the presenters emphasized the absolute need for the district to find funding. The Friends of the Rockrimmon Library heard that the closure was a possibility before the Board of Trustees did.

Surveys were conducted by HB&A contracted at a cost quote "not to exceed \$296,147.83" according to Board reports. Their findings indicated that a mill levy is necessary. However, the process by which surveys were done has not been fully disclosed or explained. It's clear that community leaders, from the City Councilor of the area to HOA leaders, teachers, and other community groups - few or none of them were not talked to prior to this possible closure decision being publicized.

By July, patrons started appearing at Board meetings to advocate for the Rockrimmon and Ruth Holly Branches to remain open. The Board only addressed the crowd stating that no decision would be made at that meeting.

October 1st, staff received information from the CEO.

"As for the possibility of seeking additional funding, the Board has asked that we set aside some money in the 2025 budget to conduct polling later next year"

The Board packet for the October meeting was released shortly before the meeting. We need a requirement for these agendas to be released at least one week before the meetings so that the community has a chance to review them. The current requirement of 24 hours is too short.

PPLD has a management flowchart in their public documents. Near the top sits the CEO. Above the CEO is the board. And above the board is you, the community. You are the ones who the library and the board should be responding to, so why hasn't the community been heard?

We're seeing PPLD withdraw from other community connections. The library has stopped participating in parades, choosing instead to advertise the library through indirect means. PPLD's visibility at these events was a way to show that staff cares about the community. Our Union filled in the library's role in two events over the summer, one parade and one festival, due to PPLD's lack of participation. Our workers did this for free. We reped our Union and our workers in an official Union role, but not as representatives of PPLD. The reception was wonderful.

Programming funding is continuing to be cut. That means fewer offerings, challenges in obtaining program-presenters and meeting community needs, reduction in presence at community events, and a further increased turnover rate given how stressed the programming department is.

The library used to provide snacks for teenagers, which fostered communication and trust between the teens and staff. This has faded away. The Friends of the Library have offered to provide these snacks at various locations, and leadership has said no. No reasoning has been given for this. I have heard through an unofficial channel that this is to adjust for the snacks to be more equitably spread across the district. Again, this has not been communicated through any library official. Most front-line staff have not received this information.

Community members have repeatedly offered to participate in pet projects. Who wouldn't donate to a cause that feeds teenagers and young folk? The funds raised for this as a yearly drive could happen - again, with real community outreach.

Utilizing community support could result in small projects being fulfilled by these fundraising groups. New toys could be purchased, seating areas in patron's favorite libraries, subscriptions to specific magazines and newspapers.

Money

We also feel, however, that there has been an irresponsible usage of funds, particularly in the security department.

Funds that could go towards other infrastructure upgrades such as IT and roofing/building maintenance. Security received a total budget increase of \$1.1 million from 2023 to 2024. Funds that could go towards other infrastructure upgrades such as IT and roofing/building maintenance.

While we absolutely want our staff to be secure, we question some of the decisions made in order to achieve this goal.

Two years ago, the 2022 budget allocated \$45,000 for a new radio system - Hytera radios. These were installed at every location, with some walkie-talkies for staff and a wall-mounted station that would always be on. But they don't work.

Wifi routers have been installed throughout the buildings to increase the connectivity of the radios. SIM cards were purchased for managers. The Hytera radios are still not functioning. It

has been two years and more investment that is not easily found in the budgets.

Instead of giving up on this project and allocating funds towards more training or more on-call overnight staff, they have continued to throw money at this project.

The same year the radios were purchased, \$35,000 was also allocated for a Security Operations Center to be built at the East library. The SoC is a room full of TV screens with Hytera radio connections and the alarms for the restroom smoke detectors. This was increased by \$65,000 for a total of \$100,000 on this project

All in all after looking through prior budgets, this project and the additional employees need to run it cost at the absolute least \$300,000.

At the Penrose library - a fencing project was approved to cover the perimeter with a 7-foot tall fence. The cost is yet to be determined, but we know it will be over \$100,000 since it requires board approval.

Is this serving a staff-safety need or is this an attempt to further alienate our homeless population? There are several changes coming that make me feel it is the latter, but if a security issue arose, I would be open to hearing it and finding out why these changes improve our workplace. The internal communication about this has been abysmal.

According to the head of Security and Facilities, the fence is necessary because, per a five-year-old study that he did not share data from, people don't feel safe using Penrose.

Installing 300 security cameras, doubling security staff, and installing exterior speakers have not increased safety, and so we need the fence. (Source: Downtown Review Board meeting minutes, May 7, 2024).

Many of the Penrose location changes are helpful and useful, but this fence so far appears useless. Unless the study is given to the staff and to the public, there is no valid justification.

Let me be clear- the last closure at the Penrose location was necessary. The seating updates and shelf height adjustments have cut back on safety incidents. This was a positive change.

The Penrose library does require upgrades, as do many libraries in the district. The East needed its parking lot fix. Penrose needed adjustments. Many branches still need some fixes.

There is deferred maintenance at other locations that need to be dealt with. Monument's doors need to be replaced. Palmer Lake library has their IT room in a bathroom closet. The East library has a fire department connection failure. There are real issues and maintenance issues that the District needs to handle.

Superfluous and aesthetic upgrades are not priorities and do not serve the public. The fence, use of funds on faulty equipment, elevator wraps, and new signs are starkly silly when there are real projects to fund.

We also want to highlight some of the management issues and some of the problems us workers face.

Despite the CEO receiving an \$8,000 bonus for job performance this year, and millions of dollars being added to the library's financial reserves, the front-line staff have struggled.

We library workers love the work we do. Many careers can be qualified as "passion work." This has caused many jobs in such fields to underpay workers due to an expectation of passion.

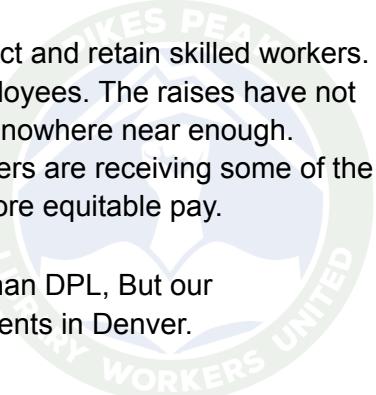
Without passionate workers, libraries would not have the same community impact. The Rockrimmon community has expressed their appreciation of the long-time workers at that branch. Libraries and their workers are the heart of a community. We facilitate these public spaces and help connect people with the resources. An empty building with books and computers is near valueless without us.

But we're overworked and understaffed. The relocation of the staff at the Rockrimmon location will not fix this, despite claims to the contrary. The chronic understaffing of Rockrimmon this past year was a leadership decision. Following the termination of Rockrimmon's manager, multiple staff members left and their positions went unadvertised for months, with some never being posted.

As positions are suddenly left vacant, not only do we lose staff but their knowledge and years of community insight and understanding. This type of institutional knowledge is not being handed down and new staff are often overwhelmed as they attempt to unravel their predecessors' duties combined with community expectation. Policy makers at the library have unrealistic expectations for staff and conflicting messaging. We have been told we "shouldn't have to do more with less resources," but are then given more and more duties - all while the workload has increased and staff workrooms are overloaded. This, combined with the turnover rate, has hampered the district's goals.

We do not receive the pay we need which we need in order to attract and retain skilled workers. Pay has actually declined in real terms for a majority of library employees. The raises have not matched cost of living, and folks need degrees to get jobs that pay nowhere near enough. Compared to the rest of the state, PPLD front-line staff and managers are receiving some of the lowest pay, though the people in upper management are seeing more equitable pay.

For example, our managers are making 17 thousand less dollars than DPL, But our chiefs are only making one thousand dollars less than their equivalents in Denver.



We have had certain levels of autonomy taken away. For example, we are no longer allowed to do displays without prior approval, having to go through multiple levels of management in order to gain permission. This has caused extra work for managers and a large backlog of work for the communications department.

Branch staff creating book displays and promoting events is necessary for library success. The current way of operating in this department is effective at district-wide advertising and promotions, but has also caused an inability for workers to highlight their branch's collection with displays and new ideas suited to their unique community.

We also question the library's decision to not engage with Banned Books Week this year, a longtime event, celebrated nationally in bookstores and libraries since about 1982. It's a symbol of the First Amendment. Maintaining freedom of speech and intellectual freedom is a core purpose of libraries. One week before this nationally recognized week, workers were informed that we had no permission to participate. There was no communication to explain why this decision was made. Banned Books week is no more at PPLD.

Finally, even with the concerns of sustainability, closing the Rockrimmon library was not necessary.

This was not an earthquake. This was not a wildfire. Not an unavoidable force of nature. This was not an inevitable decision. This was a choice that those in charge made. It was a willful decision. There are people responsible for this.

There are decisions coming up for the Ruth Holley Branch, the Cheyenne Mountain Branch on 8th street, and the Monument Library. Closure is unacceptable.

Keeping a functional, popular library open should have been a priority. The Library Board of Trustees and leadership failed in their duties to serve the interest of the El Paso community and have altered the community of Rockrimmon in a negative way. The negligence of this Board should not be forgotten, and any excuse as to their reasoning is to cover up their own failure.

Closing branches is a problem for both the public and the workers. We love our work, and we love what we provide. Without more funds, there is no staffing sustainability, and there is no way to consider expansion. Expansion is not worth depriving other communities by closing libraries.

The conclusion to all of this? Leadership and the Board of Trustees have made irresponsible decisions. There is inadequate oversight of the Board. Priorities are misplaced. There is poor transparency and communication, poor working conditions and not enough support for staff. Us workers love our jobs - that's why we unionized. Our Union exists to make the library district a better place.

Us workers deserve more, and the community deserves more. The libraries don't function without the workers, nor do they function without the community involvement. Thank you for being here.

It is the stance of our Union that we need more to thrive in our lives and our work, and it is our stance that no more libraries should be closed.

We have an email campaign. We have fliers here to link you to the site where you can send a letter to all of the City Councilors and all of the County Commissioners simultaneously. There is a template drafted through the site. Use this or write your own email, but this will contact everybody who has power over the Board simultaneously.

If anybody would like a transcript of what I have said today, let me know, and I will email you a copy.

