

A Public Statement by the Concerned Black Workers of the Free Library of Philadelphia

In June 2020, we, Concerned Black Workers of the Free Library of Philadelphia, (CBW) wrote an open letter that outlined racism and unsafe working conditions at the Free Library. What followed were [all authors and other presenters](#) cancelling their scheduled virtual appearances with the Free Library in solidarity with Concerned Black Workers. In August, the president and [CEO of the Free Library, Siobhan Reardon, resigned](#) as per our demands, as well as the demands of Philadelphia's Mayor and other Free Library staff, as she had not demonstrated actionable steps that would have resolved the mounting challenges staff are facing.

That said, there is much work to be done. The CBW and other Free Library staff have [demanded the resignation of the president of the Board of Trustees](#), who pushed for Siobhan Reardon to remain in her post even after calls for her resignation by Philadelphia's Mayor, other Trustee members, the library's Diversity & Equity consulting firm; and moreover, the resounding voice of Black and non-Black staff. This Board president has demonstrated racist actions before, and the Free Library has yet to fully ensure safety and equity moving forward.

While CBW has been gratified by the outpouring of support by authors who stood in solidarity with us, we also recognize that further author cancellations will cause Black audiences to lose out on hearing crucial stories and knowledge that now have a more of a vital place than they ever have. And cancellations will in particular hurt Black authors, who will forgo opportunities for book sales and securing honoraria for appearances.

With [the support of many members of Philadelphia's City Council](#), CBW and other staff have demanded the resignation of Board of Trustees president Pam Dembe; we have demanded full transparency, as well as our involvement and that of other staff in hiring a new permanent director; and safe and equitable reopening plans. We are asking authors and other presenters at library events, as well as their audiences, to stand in solidarity with us as we move forward to recreate a safe, equitable, and anti-racist workplace.