



STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

Safety and Security - Update

Date: January 27, 2025

To: Toronto Public Library Board

From: City Librarian

SUMMARY

As a public institution, Toronto Public Library (TPL) strives to provide welcoming and open public spaces while prioritizing the safety and security of Library staff and customers. The purpose of this report is to provide the Toronto Public Library Board with an update on progress in 2025 in addressing safety and security concerns.

TPL's Safe and Welcoming Spaces Program focuses on advancing a welcoming and supportive environment while addressing safety and security issues, and to provide support to all library users and staff, including those from vulnerable communities and equity-deserving groups.

This Program is based on the actions identified in the Alternate Approaches to Safety and Security report presented to the Library Board at the May 24, 2022 meeting, as well as other related initiatives. Previous updates were provided to the Board at its [October 25, 2022](#) meeting and at its [January 29, 2024](#) meeting. The content of this report builds on the previous updates and highlights activities in 2024, and underway or planned in 2025.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact associated with this report beyond what has already been approved in the current operating and capital budget.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

By providing a safe space for all customers and staff, while maintaining a welcoming and inclusive space for all, TPL can achieve its strategic priority of fostering shared community spaces so that all Torontonians, including those from equity-deserving populations, are able to access, use and benefit from TPL's services, programs and technology.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

TPL's Safety and Welcoming Spaces Program identifies and reinforces TPL's obligation to provide a safe space for all customers and staff, and at the same time ensure that spaces and services provided are welcoming and inclusive for all, especially for equity-deserving communities such as newcomers, persons with low-income, persons with disabilities, vulnerable seniors and youth, people living with mental health or addiction issues, people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, and Indigenous, Black and racialized groups and others.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on June 22, 2021, the Board considered [Security Guard Service – Increase to the Value of the Contract and Purchase Order](#) and staff were directed to produce a report for the Board with more information on the role of security guard services and the impact they have on Library services.

In response to this Board direction, the Board received, for information, a report entitled [Use of Security Guards at Toronto Public Library](#) at its meeting on October 25, 2021. At that meeting, the Library Board directed the City Librarian to convene a discussion table to explore alternate safety and security

strategies. The discussion table included representatives from TPL Management, the Library Board, TPLWU CUPE Local 4948, the City of Toronto and community organizations with expertise in providing services to socially excluded groups.

At its meeting on April 25, 2022, as a part of the [Provincial Election: Advocacy Opportunity](#), the Board identified an advocacy opportunity in support of improving safety and security issues faced by library staff in their interactions with customers. In addition to two opportunities identified by the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL) and the Ontario Library Association (OLA), the Board approved advocacy efforts related to requesting increased investments in mental health and addiction crisis intervention services available to the community to address the urgent needs of urban public libraries in addressing safety and security issues.

At its meeting on May 24, 2022, the Board considered the report [Alternate Approaches to Safety and Security at Toronto Public Library](#), which contains the findings of the Discussion Table, and endorsed 11 specific short-term actions.

At its meeting on October 25, 2022, the Board received for information, a [Safety and Security Update](#) on progress in implementing 11 short-term actions identified in [Alternate Approaches to Safety and Security at Toronto Public Library](#), as well as other related initiatives.

At its meeting on January 29, 2024, the Board received for information, a [Safety and Security Update](#) on further progress made in 2023.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

TPL is committed to providing welcoming and supportive spaces for the public and staff across its 100-branch network. Providing access to public space and ensuring everyone feels welcome and has equal opportunity to use and benefit from its spaces and services is embedded in TPL's mission and strategic priorities. TPL has an obligation to provide a safe and inclusive space for all customers and staff.

Toronto is a densely populated, complex urban environment with mental health, addictions and other challenges that have been further exacerbated

during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. As one of the few public spaces that are open to everyone, TPL branches reflect the city in all its facets, and the Library has experienced a significant increase in the number of safety and security incidents over the last four years. The impacts of such incidents on staff and other customers can be difficult and challenging.

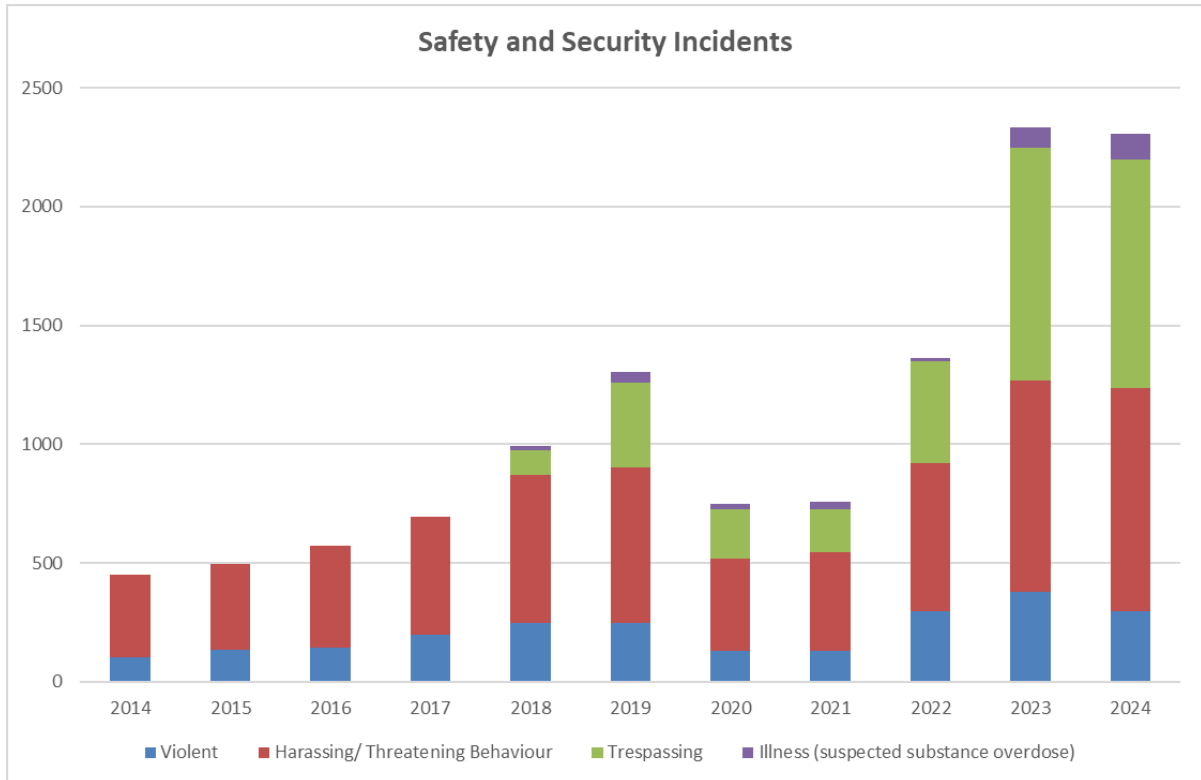
After several years of significant increases, the number of safety and security-related incidents at branches levelled-off in 2024, with 2,306 incidents compared to 2,334 in 2023. Safety and security incidents include:

- Violent behaviour (down 22%)
- Harassing or threatening behaviour (up 6%)
- Trespassing by previously excluded customers (down 2%)
- Suspected overdoses (up 24%)

Most incidents occur in twenty or so specific branches, particularly those in the downtown core. The majority of library branches experience relatively few or no incidents. Attachment 1 shows the geographic distribution of safety and security incidents across the City.

Number of Safety and Security Incidents by Year (2014-2024)

Year	Violent	Harassing/ Threatening Behaviour	Trespassing	Illness (suspected substance overdose)	Total	Annual Change
2014	105	345			450	
2015	135	363			498	11%
2016	145	427			572	15%
2017	196	497			693	21%
2018	249	623	102	18	992	43%
2019	248	654	357	43	1302	31%
2020	132	385	211	21	749	-42%
2021	129	415	183	29	756	1%
2022	297	623	428	14	1362	80%
2023	379	887	980	88	2334	71%
2024	295	941	961	109	2306	-1%



COMMENTS

This report provides an update on recent activities and plans for 2025. The report provides updates under four themes:

1. Spaces
2. Services
3. Staff
4. Leadership

Spaces

- Public Safety
 - Creation of new Public Safety Unit: In 2023, TPL added a new position of Manager, Public Safety, supported by a Project Coordinator, Security Services, to provide professional oversight of all security programs and systems, including security guard services, building access systems, security cameras, intrusion alarm systems and fire alarm systems.

- Security Guards
 - In 2023, TPL conducted a comprehensive review of the use of security guards, and in 2024 transitioned to a new guard supplier, Cancom Security. As part of this change, TPL migrated to the use of higher-level guards at all branches where guards are deployed. This provides greater flexibility as well as ensuring that guards have the range of skills that are required, including mental health first aid, trauma-informed and equity training. TPL has also added four additional dedicated mobile guard units to respond to incidents when they occur, which brings the total number of active mobile guard units to eight. The additional mobile units have improved coverage volume and significantly reduced incident response times.

- Physical Site Security
 - In the last two years, TPL also completed a comprehensive review of physical site security measures, including security cameras, site access and related systems and processes. Additional upgrades to systems and procedures are underway and will continue.

 - Policies and guidelines on Physical Security and Security Cameras are being developed and will be brought to the Library Board for approval in Q1 2025.

 - Recent physical security design initiatives have included:
 1. Review of current security hardware and documentation
 2. Installation/upgrades of security cameras at high incident branches
 3. Recommendations for physical security design standards
 4. Workplace violence risk assessment at 22 higher incident branches
 5. New Security hardware vendor of record roster for capital projects to expedite purchase and installation of hardware such as cameras

 - Washroom Sensors pilot: TPL has been conducting a pilot of washroom sensors in five single-use (accessible) washrooms at Toronto Reference Library. The sensor sends an alert to security if a washroom has been occupied for a period of time or if no movement has been detected. A wellness check is then performed and the outcome recorded. Sensors do not prevent overdoses but have been determined to be a useful tool to support more effective wellness checks. Based on the success of this

pilot, planning is underway for further rollout of these sensors to other high incident branches across the system.

- Signage: TPL plays a unique role in providing a welcoming space for all. Efforts are focused on ensuring that safety and security initiatives are designed and implemented in a way that fosters a welcoming environment for all who wish to use Library services. Signage is in place across TPL's 100 branches to reinforce that TPL is a welcoming space for all, and at the same time reinforce the need to follow library rules of conduct.
- Rules of Conduct Policy:
 - Revisions have been made to the Rules of Conduct Policy to incorporate positive, clear, and inclusive language to convey customer responsibilities in a trauma-informed way. The policy specifically outlines the shared responsibilities of customers and staff in maintaining a safe and welcoming environment in any Library space or space where the Library is a contributor or collaborator. Additionally, the policy has been reorganized to include broad categories so the policy is easier to understand for customers and easier for staff to reference and explain. Definitions of violent, harassing and disruptive behaviours have been incorporated into the policy so staff can explain to customers how these behaviours violate the Rules of Conduct.
 - Revisions have also been made to the Rules of Conduct - Exclusion, Reinstatement and Appeals Policy to introduce a one-month exclusion from a single branch for persons under the age of 18 in recognition that the expectations for children and teens behaviour may be different than adults. The policy language has also been refined to clearly and consistently articulate the actions staff will take in instances of a suspension or exclusion. The policy also highlights the restorative practice of requiring the excluded person to meet with a Manager to review the incident and expected behaviour in the library when requesting an appeal.

Services

- Social Service Teams
 - TPL's [Social Service Team](#) initiative, delivered in partnership with Gerstein Crisis Centre (GCC), began offering onsite service in 2023 as a pilot at four TPL branches. Gerstein's Community Crisis Intervention Workers (CCIW's) provide collaborative, on-site, low-barrier mental health and crisis support and programs for individuals accessing the library, where they already feel safe. This initiative is designed as a free public service to TPL's customers who are experiencing the often-intersecting vulnerabilities of mental health challenges, addictions, low income and homelessness or precarious housing. This initiative is being operationalized as of January 2025 as a permanent TPL service including a dedicated team at Toronto Reference Library, and will further expand to more branches in 2025 with support from the TPL Foundation.
 - [Finding Recovery through Exercise Skills and Hope \(F.R.E.S.H.\)](#): This program launched the same month as the pilot at all four locations. The program uses a peer-led model to help people get active, strengthen their community and social connections, and develop new skills and knowledge. Facilitators share widely the F.R.E.S.H programming schedule and offer a variety of activities.
 - [Wellness Recovery Action Plan \(WRAP\)](#): Launched in late 2023, this educational program focuses on mental health recovery and operates on an eight-week session model. In a group setting, individuals explore self-help tools (i.e. peer counseling, focusing exercises, and relaxation and stress reduction techniques). The program series provides participants with transit supports and refreshments.
 - [SafeTALK](#): This three-hour SafeTALK workshop equips participants to become more alert to the signs of suicidal thoughts and better able to connect individuals with the necessary support. In fall 2023, GCC staff offered one suicide prevention workshop to TPL staff and two public workshops to the public at Sanderson and Lillian H. Smith.
- Community Services
 - TPL's [Community Librarians](#) provide vital connections to those who are most vulnerable and isolated in Toronto. Community Librarians develop trusting relationships and provide critical support at the point of need.

Current Community Librarian placements support Toronto's Senior Strategy 2.0 (PDF) and the Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy (PDF).

- TPL offers a suite of services to support vulnerable populations at their point of need, which is often within library spaces. Initiatives in this suite include:
 - [WiFi Hotspot Lending](#)
 - [Virtual Interview Rooms](#)
 - [Complimentary PRESTO Passes](#)
 - Free sock distribution at 20 locations
- Programs
 - TPL offers various programs for a wide range of audiences and outcomes. Programs provide safe, welcoming spaces to promote social inclusion and connect staff and customers by developing relationships with each other and other community organizations.
 - [Coffee & Conversation](#): low-barrier, drop-in, program that encourages informal connections with staff, customers, and local community agencies.
 - [MyAccesshousingTO](#): Between June to September 2024, housing workers provided valuable information on Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) at 22 branches. The hands-on workshops offered 251 participants the opportunity to learn about the registration process with the online system.
 - [National Housing Day](#) annual event held every November which focuses on issues of housing and homelessness. The event is in partnership with Homeless Connect Toronto and consists of a documentary screening followed by a panel discussion. In 2024, Toronto Reference Library hosted the event for 69 attendees.
- Connections to Community Resources
 - Offsite Outreach Safety Guidelines (September 2024): These guidelines establish best practices and recommendations for all library staff with outreach in their job descriptions who may work outside of physical library branches, delivering TPL programs and services at external community organizations, agencies, and partner locations (i.e. Toronto Seniors Housing Corporation, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, etc.).

- Toronto Community Crisis Service: In 2022, selected TPL branches began using the [Toronto Community Crisis Service](#) (TCCS), a new, alternate approach to responding to people in crisis that focuses on health, prevention and well-being. TCCS is now available across the city, and all branches can access this service which provides an alternative to police enforcement, through a community-based, client-centered, trauma-informed response to non-emergency crisis calls and wellness checks.
- Building Relationships with City Services (October 2024): Outlines the structure of support tables and services provided by the City of Toronto, and how TPL fits into that structure.
- TPL fosters and strengthens relationships with key City tables and groups, including: FOCUS tables ([Furthering Our Communities United Services](#)); SPIDER tables ([Specialized Program for Inter-Divisional Enhanced Responsiveness to Vulnerability](#)); CCP clusters ([Community Coordination Plan](#)); and TAEH forum ([Toronto Housing and Homelessness Service Planning forum](#)).
- TPL Agency Connection Guide: The Community Outreach and Engagement working group is developing plans to help strengthen and set standards for branch connections with community agencies, including processes to update branch community asset logs and contact lists. Documentation and training supports will define roles & responsibilities for staff to develop and maintain lists of organizations and agencies serving vulnerable populations, with guidance on how branches can develop their own relationships and resource lists with referral agencies and organizations in their catchment areas.

Staff

- **Workplace Psychological Health and Safety Policy**
 - In recognition of the importance of psychological health and safety in the workplace, TPL's Workplace Psychological Health and Safety Policy was approved in May 2024. This policy affirms the Library's commitment to actions to promote mental health and psychological well-being and to prevent harm to worker psychological health through appropriate policies, programs and services.
- **TPL Workplace Mental Health Survey**
 - In 2022, TPL conducted an employee engagement survey, which identified psychological wellness as an area of concern. As a first step in addressing this important issue, in Q3 2024 TPL launched its first Workplace Mental Health Survey. Results of the survey are being compiled and will be shared with staff. The data gathered from the survey will help TPL to assess and address issues relating to workplace psychological health and safety. This information will provide a starting point for the development of a Workplace Mental Health and Well-Being action plan.
- **Learning and Development**
 - **Safe and Welcoming Spaces Learning Path:** In 2024, TPL completed and launched a comprehensive staff training framework to further develop staff capability and confidence. The Safe and Welcoming Learning Path provides an integrated curriculum of curated courses and resources in areas related to trauma-informed safety, security and welcoming spaces. It identifies core, mandatory learning programs that will provide a foundational set of skills and abilities for all staff, as well as further elective options to build deeper knowledge and capability in specific areas. Some of the learning programs included in the learning path are:
 - **Workplace Violence Prevention & Response Program:** TPL's new e-learning module launched in Q4 2024. All staff will be required to complete this program.
 - **Mental Health First Aid:** TPL partnered with the Mental Health Commission of Canada to launch Mental Health First Aid training for TPL staff. Seven sessions ran in 2024 and more are underway in 2025. A small group of staff have been certified as in-house trainers to deliver the program in TPL branches across the City.

- Trauma-Informed Practices: Another essential component to fostering a welcoming environment for all is to incorporate a trauma-informed approach, that recognizes the impact of past and current trauma for individuals and takes steps to avoid re-traumatization. In December 2024, TPL announced the launch of a series of staff learning and development sessions on Trauma-Informed Practice. Developed in partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association, this new program incorporates in-depth training for staff and managers across TPL. Rollout is now underway.
- The Safe and Welcoming Spaces Learning Path includes a number of other important learning programs that are already available on learn:tpl, TPL's learning management system for staff, or in development. These include Dealing with Difficult Behaviours; Rules of Conduct; Incident Reporting Management System (IRMS); Human Rights and Harassment; Harm Reduction & Opioid Response; and others. The new Safe and Welcoming Spaces Learning Path brings all of these programs together into a curated play list for various types of roles in branches and other parts of TPL.
- **Staff Communications & Engagement**
 - Branch town hall meetings: In 2023 and 2024, TPL senior leaders have conducted a regular schedule of branch town hall meetings where members of TPL's management team meet with branch staff in a small group setting. By the end of 2024, about two dozen such branch town halls had been held, focused primarily at branches with high rates of safety and security incidents. These meetings provide a vehicle for two-way dialogue and joint problem-solving. A schedule of 2025 sessions is being developed.
 - Online: TPL's intranet, share:tpl, incorporates a Safety and Security section that provides staff with updates on safety and security initiatives. In addition, the Human Resources site on share:tpl was completely redesigned in 2024 to provide staff with ready access to information on all HR topics including health, safety and wellness.
 - All-Staff Town Halls: all-staff town halls are conducted on a quarterly basis, including the opportunity for staff to submit questions on a wide

range of topics, including safety and security. Town halls are broadcast online and recorded versions are available for viewing.

- Joint Health and Safety Committees: TPL has a well-established, effective joint health and safety committee program, including a subgroup on workplace violence. Regional Committees and the Central Joint Health & Safety Committee play an important leadership role on various initiatives supporting workplace health and safety, including the Workplace Violence Prevention and Response program.

- **Staff Support**

- Library Safety Specialists: In 2022 TPL conducted a benchmarking review of best practices and innovations being introduced by other public libraries in North America to address safety and security concerns. As a result of that review, TPL has added a new staff role of Library Safety Specialists (LSSs) and hired staff into this new role. Using a trauma-informed approach, LSSs work with other TPL staff and with guards to engage customers, explaining and enforcing the rules of conduct, developing effective working relationships with library customers, monitor library spaces for appropriate customer behaviour, and de-escalate situations as required. LSS roles work under the leadership and direction of the Senior Manager, Welcoming Spaces within the Human Resources Division. In 2024, four new positions were created, bringing the total number of LSSs to ten. Additional LSS positions are planned for 2025.

Leadership

- **TPL Leadership**

- Program Governance and Oversight: TPL has now fully implemented a governance and oversight framework for the Safe and Welcoming Spaces Program. Working under the oversight of the Directors Committee, the Safety and Security Leadership Team (SSLT) meets on a regular basis to ensure that all related activities and initiatives are aligned and coordinated. The SSLT is chaired by the Senior Manager, Welcoming Spaces, and brings together management from Branch Operations and Customer Experience, Service Development and Innovation, Enterprise Projects and Facilities, and Human Resources.
- Evaluation: TPL has also begun work on an overall measurement and evaluation framework, to support continuous improvement of the

various initiatives that comprise the Safe and Welcoming Spaces Program.

- **Library Sector Leadership**

- Public Libraries: TPL has been an active partner in the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC) - Safety and Security Working Group, which engages in awareness and advocacy on behalf of Canadian urban libraries. Moe Hosseini-Ara, Director, Branch Operations and Customer Experience, currently serves as Chair of CULC's Safety and Security Team.

CONCLUSION

Creating and maintaining safe and welcoming spaces is an ongoing effort, requiring collaboration, creativity and resourcefulness from all areas within the organization. In 2024, TPL continued to invest additional funds in safe and welcoming spaces initiatives, including Library Safety Specialists, guards, security and surveillance systems, and other resources. These steps are having a tangible, positive impact in branches across TPL. Working in partnership with TPL staff, union, and other stakeholders, TPL will continue to implement further actions in 2025 to foster safe and welcoming spaces at all library locations.

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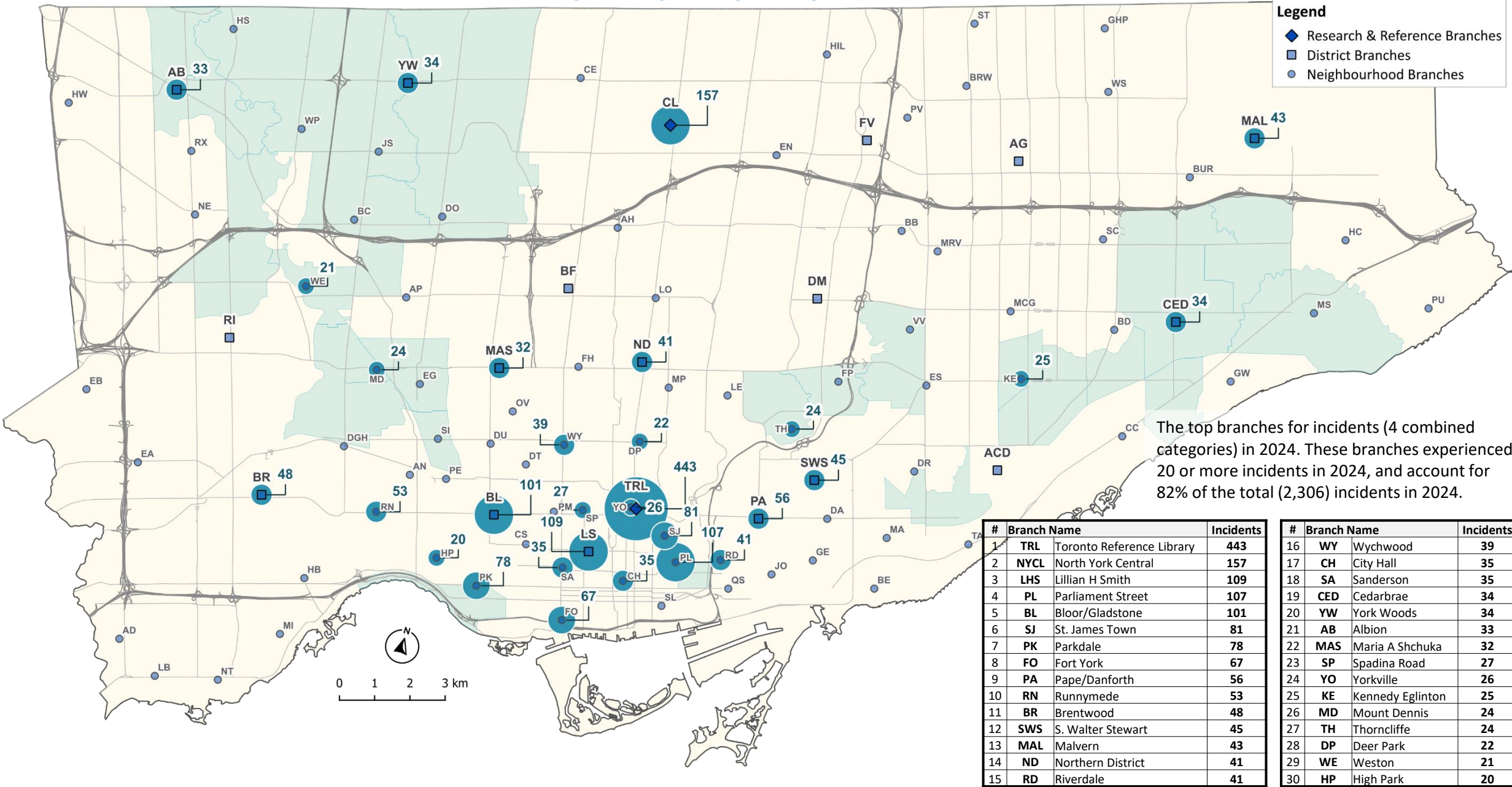
Vickery Bowles
City Librarian

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: 2024 TPL Branches with Highest Incident Rate by Type

2024 TPL Branches with Highest Incident Rates

Violent + Harassing + Trespassing + Suspected Overdoses (combined)





TPL safety and security update

Toronto Public Library Board Meeting

January 27, 2025



Safe and Welcoming Spaces Program

- TPL's Safe and Welcoming Spaces Program has its genesis in the 2022 Discussion Table on Alternate Approaches to Safety and Security
- The program has two key goals:
 - advance a welcoming and supportive environment while addressing safety and security issues
 - provide support to all library users and staff, including those from vulnerable communities and equity-deserving groups
- The program encompasses four domains of action:
 - spaces
 - services
 - staff
 - leadership

Safe and Welcoming Spaces Program

spaces

Recent and current initiatives

- Full build-out of new Public Safety Unit in Enterprise Projects & Facilities
- Rollout of new security guard provider Cancom with enhanced coverage
- Review and upgrading of physical security systems and measures
- New policies on physical security and security cameras being finalized
- Rules of Conduct revisions
- Workplace violence risk assessments at high-incident branches
- Washroom sensors project
- Safe and welcoming spaces signage

Safe and Welcoming Spaces Program services

Recent and current initiatives

- Social service teams
- Community services
- Programs
 - Coffee and conversation
- Connections to community resources
 - Toronto Community Crisis Service (TCCS)
 - Connections to City Services and Agencies



Safe and Welcoming Spaces Program

staff

Recent and current initiatives

- Safe and welcoming spaces learning path
 - Workplace violence prevention and response
 - Mental health first aid
 - Trauma-informed practice
 - Human rights and harassment
- Staff support
 - library safety specialists
- Staff communications and engagement
 - branch town halls and all-staff virtual town halls
- Workplace mental health program
 - psychological health and safety policy
 - 2024 workplace mental health survey

Safe and Welcoming Spaces Program leadership

Recent and current initiatives

- Safety and security leadership team
- Program measurement and evaluation
- Library sector leadership
 - CULC Safety and Security Working Group
 - Advocacy at Provincial and Federal levels

TPL Safe and Welcoming Spaces Program

safety and security incidents

After several years of significant increases, the number of safety and security-related incidents levelled-off in 2024





thank you questions?

contacts

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