

Editor's note: *Following is the full response by Westport Library officials to complaints about Patti Smith's appearance at VersoFest.*

VersoFest is The Westport Library's annual celebration of creativity, innovation, and the transformative power of the arts. The event spans four days and features more than a dozen speakers, performances, panels, and workshops, showcasing a diverse range of voices and artists including legendary David Letterman Show music director Paul Shaffer, Grammy Award-winning band the Wallflowers, punk pioneer and spoken word artist Henry Rollins, hip hop legend Black Thought of The Roots, a symposium on Bruce Springsteen, a family-friendly weekend kickoff event, and much more.

As a National Book Award winner, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee, and internationally recognized singer, photographer, and poet, Patti Smith was invited as part of a long-planned

program celebrating her contributions to literature, music, and the arts — with a focus on her latest book, *A Book of Days*, a photo volume offering a unique, yearlong journey through her life. As with all major public events, the invitation was extended following an internal review consistent with the Library's programming standards.

The Library welcomes community input, including community concerns. When concerns are raised, the Library is guided by its mission, philosophy, policies and procedures, with reference to applicable law and to professional standards and guidelines established by the American Library Association (ALA) and Connecticut Library Association (CLA). This guidance sets forth the Library's core commitment to intellectual freedom, freedom of expression, civil discourse, and the free and open exchange of information and ideas.

In response to the concerns raised about Ms. Smith's participation in VersoFest, the Library listened to concerned patrons and town residents and responded in every instance that we have been able to do so, consulted with and received

the support of our Board of Trustees, talked with our legal representation, and met repeatedly throughout the process with Library leadership.

The Library condemns antisemitism and all forms of hate. And we say with heartfelt sincerity that we appreciate the sensitivities and strong feelings involved in these conversations. We understand these issues touch on a range of personal and political perspectives, and we remain committed to facilitating civil, inclusive dialogue through our ongoing Common Ground Initiative and antisemitism education programs. As part of this commitment, and in conjunction with our presenting partner ADL Connecticut, we invite the community to a screening of the documentary film *October 8* on April 17, followed by a talkback with the production team and a Q&A.

With due respect and consideration for the deeply felt positions and views that have been raised, VersoFest 2025 will proceed as scheduled. It would be inconsistent with the Library's mission, policies, and commitment to the free and open exchange of ideas to rescind Ms. Smith's invitation

or cancel her scheduled event. The Library does not endorse the views of any program speaker or performer simply by hosting them.

The Library also wants to clarify that VersoFest is not funded by taxpayer dollars. It is a self-sustaining event made possible through ticket sales, private sponsorships, merchandise revenue, and donor-restricted funds designated specifically for programming. No municipal funding is used to pay for artist fees or production expenses. This model ensures that the Library's publicly supported resources remain fully dedicated to its core services and operations.