

DENVER CITY COUNCIL



Proclamation No. 25-0244

A Proclamation honoring Omar Blair, Elvin Caldwell, Pauline Short Robinson, Dr. Justina Ford, Bob Ragland, and Their Namesakes: Denver's African American Libraries

WHEREAS, Omar Blair was born in Texas in 1918. He spent most of his childhood in Denver, Colorado, Albuquerque, New Mexico and Phoenix, Arizona. During World War II he worked as an armorer, served as a Tuskegee Airman, and was an original member of the 332nd fighter group, known as the famous "Red Tails." In 1970, he became the Opportunity Officer at the Air Force Finance and Account Center at Lowry Air Force Base. From 1968 to 1978 he was a member of the Denver Urban Renewal Authority and helped initiate the building of the 16th street mall. In 1973, during the time of court-ordered integration of Denver Public Schools, he was elected to the Denver Board of Education and served as the first African American Board President from 1977 to 1981; and

WHEREAS, Elvin Caldwell was born in 1919 in Denver, Colorado, grew up in the Five Points neighborhood, and attended both the University of Colorado and University of Denver. During World War II, he worked as the chief statistician and the assistant superintendent for production at the Remington Arms Company. From 1950 to 1955, he was elected and served in the Colorado House of Representatives and was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1952. Then, in 1955, he was elected to Denver City Council, becoming the first Black person to serve in a city council seat west of the Mississippi, and ultimately served as a member for seven terms, including five as City Council president. His leadership brought about funding for the Skyline Urban Renewal Project, funding for the Denver General Hospital facility (now Denver Health), and funding from the Community Development Agency for housing and economic development. Caldwell fought for an end to racial discrimination at the Colorado State Home for Dependent Children, Clayton College, Park Hill Golf Course, the Denver Fire Department and the Denver Police Department. In 1980, he vacated his City Council seat to accept a mayoral appointment to the position of Manager of Safety; and

WHEREAS, the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library opened in 2003. The library's collections document the Black experience in the Rocky Mountain west. It replaced the original Five Points Branch Library and is considered is a key component of the Denver Landmark National Register Historic District. In 2024, it became part of the African American Civil Rights Network; and

WHEREAS, Pauline Short Robinson was born in 1915 in Oklahoma. She came to Denver to attend school at the Emily Griffith School and University of Denver, where she graduated with her Bachelor of Science in Library Science in 1943. When the Community Vocational Center Library, where she had actively worked to create a community space, was threatened with closure, Robinson and local school principals lobbied for a new DPL library to be built, and the Cosmopolitan Branch Library was built in 1945. Robinson was appointed head librarian and became Denver's first Black librarian. In 1947, she organized the first Negro History Week at New Hope Baptist Church, which later became Denver's Black History Month. She started the Reading is Fundamental to Denver program, and for many years was the Chairwoman of the Vacation Reading and National Children's Book Week celebration in Denver, which later became the DPL Summer of Adventure program; and

WHEREAS, a new Denver Public Library was built and opened in 1996 and named in her honor in the Northeast Park Hill Neighborhood; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Justina Ford was born in 1871 in Illinois. She was raised there and attended the Hering Medical School in Chicago. After two years in Alabama, she and her husband, Reverend John L. Ford, settled in Denver in 1902. At this time, she became the first Black female physician licensed to practice medicine in Colorado. After she was denied privileges at Denver General Hospital, she set up her own medical office in Five Points. There she practiced gynecology, obstetrics and pediatrics, and was known for caring for anyone who needed help regardless of ability to pay. She delivered over 7,000 babies during her career; and

WHEREAS, in 1975, the Warren Branch Library in the Whittier neighborhood of northeast Denver was renamed the Ford-Warren Library in her honor; and



WHEREAS, Bob Ragland, born in 1938 in Cleveland, Ohio, showed an early ability for creating art. After joining the Army at the age of 18, he was stationed at Fort Carson in Colorado Springs. In Denver, he took art classes at Rocky Mountain School of art and developed a love of welding at the Emily Griffith Opportunity School. In 1965, he held his first solo art show commemorating the civil rights movement. He tirelessly convinced Denverites to vote in elections and taught children and adults how to create their own art. As he grew more popular, he strove to keep his art affordable for everyone. He had a strong interest in encouraging young artists of color, and believed an important part of training young artists was teaching them how to make a living through art. His home in the Whittier neighborhood was surrounded by his artwork, displayed for everyone to see; and

WHEREAS, in 2022, the Denver Public Library opened its newest branch and after an extensive community process, chose to name the branch in honor of Mr. Ragland; and

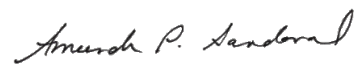
WHEREAS, Black History Month is an opportunity to acknowledge and remember the history of these five libraries: the Pauline Robinson Branch, Ford-Warren Branch, Bob Ragland Branch, and Blair-Caldwell Branch, and the incredible Denverites whose names they bear.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT PROCLAIMES BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER:

Section 1. That the Council of the City and County of Denver commemorates and celebrates the history of Denver’s African American Libraries and those whose names they bear.

Section 2. That the Clerk of the City and County of Denver shall affix the seal of the City and County of Denver to this proclamation and that a copy be transmitted to the Denver Public Library and the families of Omar Blair, Elvin Caldwell, Pauline Short Robinson, Dr. Justina Ford, and Bob Ragland.

PASSED BY THE COUNCIL FEBRUARY 24, 2025



PRESIDENT

