



To support and represent trustees in advancing public libraries

October 11, 2017

Attention: Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

Regarding 2018 BC Government Budget Priorities

Dear Committee Members,

This submission is on behalf of the BC Library Trustees Association, which represents over 700 community leaders and local government officials who govern public libraries across British Columbia.

It is urgent that we bring to your immediate attention the importance of provincial support for public libraries. Public libraries are the only public institutions that are truly equitable in providing services for all community members so that they may participate in, and benefit from the social and economic development of their communities. Public libraries are also the only freely accessible public spaces for all British Columbians to connect with, learn about, and experience, the advantages of living in this province.

We know that public libraries significantly contribute to the government's goals for making life more affordable, improving services, and building a strong, sustainable and innovative economy for all British Columbians.

Every year we experience increased use across our 247 public libraries that serve over 360 B.C. communities. In 2016, based on statistics gathered by the Libraries Branch, Ministry of Education, public library service across the province included over:

- 61.6 million visits to library branches, in person and virtual
- 90,000 kids in the Summer Reading Club
- 59 million items circulated
- 3,500 computer access points
- 1.7 million attending programs

These numbers are impressive, as are the stories behind them. Stories such as people accessing government services and employment opportunities through the help of library staff and computers; newcomers finding welcoming services and support for integration; students learning together, whatever their age and background; and families thriving through the joy of reading and attending programs that support childhood and family development.

The BCLTA urges the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services to understand that provincial government financial support is critical to the successful continuance of public libraries and their positive impact on B.C. communities.

As such, we ask that the provincial government include the following priorities in the 2018 provincial budget:

1. Provincial Funding for Public Libraries

Provincial funding that, at a minimum, includes annual increases to account for inflation. While libraries appreciate the stability of grant funding that government has provided since 2010 (approximately \$14 million per year), the lack of regular increases means that each year libraries receive less and less support, due to inflationary pressures. After many years of this, libraries are falling behind in their ability to meet growing needs.

As well, we advocate for the reinstatement of the Budget Line Item for B.C. public libraries.

2. Public Library Services in First Nation Communities

The establishment of provincial resources and funding to work with First Nation communities on defining, developing, and delivering public library services in First Nation communities, by First Nation communities, is required. Many of these communities have few to no library services, and this gap inhibits certain opportunities for learning, discovery and creativity that are available to other British Columbians.

3. Connectivity

Government commitment to connectivity is needed. Connectivity is critical in the digital age, yet adequate broadband is always in short supply and/or cost-prohibitive, particularly in rural or remote locations. Most libraries are faced with both rising costs and rising demand.

4. Provincial Support for Public Library Boards

Provincial funding and resources for trustee orientation and board learning and development is in alignment with the Ministry's responsibility for the successful oversight of the legislative and governance framework for public libraries and the upholding of the *Library Act*. Strong effective public library boards are critically important for strong effective public libraries.

The BCLTA appreciates the opportunity to participate in this provincial budget process. We trust that you will fully consider the positive impact of libraries across the province and our priorities for the 2018 budget.

Sincerely,



Barbara Kelly

Executive Director, BCLTA

cc: Jerrilyn Schembri, President, BCLTA