

Dear Committee Members,

I am the Library Director for the Grand Forks & District Public Library, and I am writing to bring your urgent attention to the importance of sustained provincial support for public libraries. 99% of British Columbians have access to a local public library. BC has 71 public libraries with 241 service locations. More than 15.6 million items are available to borrow across the province, and in 2017, 52 million items were checked out. In the same year, we shared over 135,000 items between libraries, and offered 74,000 programs to the public, which 1.74 million people attended. We have 3600 computers available for public use across the province. At the Grand Forks & District Public Library in 2018, we had over 72,000 visitors, offered 504 programs to 5378 attendees, and our public WiFi was used 25,500 times.

Research has shown that public libraries offer an incredible “return on investment”. The Vancouver Island Regional Library conducted a study on their services in 2016, and found that for every \$1 put into the library, patrons received \$5.36 in value. Other Canadian public libraries have found the same: value for each dollar put into the local public library offers from \$4-\$7 in returns.

Public libraries are incredible resources to their local communities, offering a plethora of services to all sections of the population to offer an overall improvement in quality of life for the community. 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. Moreover, in rural areas, public libraries are often one of the only places to go and be inside without buying anything, to access the internet, to meet and interact with others, and to find educational and entertainment opportunities. In small communities, public libraries are not only important community resources, but an absolutely essential service.

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. Since 2009, the public library community has asked that the provincial government provide funding for public libraries that, at a minimum, includes annual increases to account for inflation. Despite these repeated requests, for the past decade public libraries have received no increase to funding. And so I am asking the provincial government for \$20 million for public libraries in 2020, as this will help address the chronic under-funding, lack of increases for inflation, and past government cuts.

I am also asking that the province investigate a more equitable funding model for public libraries that addresses the needs of rural libraries, in which the financial situation is much more precarious than it is in larger centres. While libraries in urban areas boast access to the latest and greatest in all kinds of technology, makerspaces, and program offerings, our little library has been struggling to even buy enough books - in the last decade our book budget has decreased by more than 30%, from \$45,000 to \$30,000, as inflationary pressures for our other expenses force us to make cuts in the few places we have control over. Other rural libraries find themselves in similar situations. This is an unsustainable practice, and so we must implement a special consideration for the needs of rural libraries in budget allocations.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

Cari Lynn Gawletz, Grand Forks & District Public Library