

June 27, 2019

Regarding 2020 BC Government Budget Priorities

Dear Members of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services:

This submission is on behalf of the McBride & District Public Library, a rural library association that serves a population of 1700 spread along 200km of remote highway in north-central BC.

It is urgent that we bring your immediate attention to the importance of provincial support for public libraries.

Our library, and others across the province, 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. Equitable access to knowledge and ideas, and the places for people to connect with resources, tools, and each other, are essential for a thriving democratic society with strong 21st century skills. Libraries are the only free, accessible public institutions that offer those, so that every community member may participate in, and benefit from, the social and economic development of their communities.

In 2018 the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services again recognized the need for adequate and reliable provincial funding. As Trustees our task is to ensure the fiscal management and long-term planning for our library's success, and we appreciate this shared understanding. We are concerned, however, that despite years of recommendations from the Select Standing Committee, an increase - key to sustaining basic levels of service - has not yet been funded.

We are economically vulnerable. Our library receives 10% of our core funding from the Province, and has a total budget of \$170,000. The cost of keeping our doors open increases each year, yet there has been no increase to provincial funding (of \$14 million) since 2009. This means that we continue to absorb a year-over-year reduction in revenue, and turn to our municipal partners to help fill in gaps.

Our little library continues to grow. In 2018 we lent more than 22,000 items (an increase of 16%) and offered 299 programs with 2500 attendees. Through our doors job seekers found workshops, resources, and free internet access. New

families found a public place to connect with neighbours, whether at our Tuesday Night Music Jam, English language learning in our meeting room, or with other young families at Mother Goose. Community members accessed free legal advice via Skype, instead of travelling more than 200km to the nearest lawyer. Youth spent hours exploring Lego Robotics, and seniors gathered to learn the ukulele. We provided free Internet access, one-on-one technological assistance, and tools for people to develop digital literacy.

We are not alone. Across the 247 public library service points serving BC we are making a difference to community social and economic development and individual well-being through:

1. Reconciliation initiatives that open dialogue and advance the TRC Calls to Action.
 - a. [The Blanket Exercise](#), Nelson Public Library
 - b. [Let's Talk about Reconciliation: Indigenous Film Series](#), Surrey Libraries
 - c. [An evening with Bob Joseph, 21 Things You May Not Know about the Indian Act](#), Smithers Public Library
 - d. [Secwepemctsin](#), Thompson Nicola Regional Library, Kamloops Library
2. People accessing the information and resources they need for personal enjoyment and life needs.
 - a. [Chetwynd Resource Centre](#), Chetwynd Public Library
 - b. [Gale Courses](#), Fraser Lake Public Library
 - c. [Outreach / Homebound Services](#), Castlegar Public Library
 - d. Welcoming spaces and services for forest fire evacuees.
3. Newcomers finding welcoming services and support for integration.
 - a. [Newcomers: Welcome to the Okanagan Regional Library!](#)
 - b. [New-to-BC: The Library Link for Newcomers](#)
 - c. [Immigrant Settlers Services Drop-in](#), Whistler Public Library
4. Community members learning together, whatever their need and background.
 - a. [Quest Lecture Series](#), Squamish Public Library
 - b. [The Playground](#), Fraser Valley Regional Library
 - c. [LGBTQ2 and Allies Youth Group](#), Gibsons and District Public Library
5. Families thriving through the joy of reading and attending programs that support childhood and family development.
 - a. [BC Summer Reading Club](#)
 - b. [STEAM Afternoons](#), Invermere Public Library
 - c. [Northern Routes Discovery Pass](#), Prince George Public Library

For many years public demand on our resources in McBride exceeded our capacity, and in 2018 we doubled our space at the new Robson Valley Exploration & Learning Centre on Main Street. Since our May move, library visits have increased by 83%, our circulation has increased by 1/3, and internet



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access has doubled. For our small community this speaks to local residents' engagement and interest.

Since 2009 the public library community has asked that the provincial government provide funding for public libraries that, at a minimum, accounts for inflation. For ten years we have not received any increase to funding. This year we are asking the provincial government for \$20 million for public libraries in 2020. This will help address the chronic under-funding, lack of increases for inflation, and past government cuts.

Public libraries are a good investment. For every \$1 in provincial funding, \$17 are leveraged from local, regional, or federal sources. Provincial funding is integral to maintaining our physical and digital infrastructure and core services.

On behalf of the McBride & District Public Library I urge the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services to act on our shared understanding that provincial government financial support is critical to the successful continuance of public libraries and their positive impact on BC communities. We're calling for \$20 million in 2020.

Your attention to this urgent issue is appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Glenn Foster'.

Glenn Foster
Board Chair, McBride & District Public Library

CC: Minister Fleming, Ministry of Education
Shirley Bond, MLA, Prince-George Valemount
Dannielle Alan, Area H Representative, Regional District of Fraser-Fort George
Gene Runtz, Mayor of McBride
Mari Martin, Director of Libraries Branch
The BC Public Library Partners:
Scott Hargrove, Chair, Association of BC Public Library Directors
Babs Kelly, Executive Director, BC Library Trustees Association
Annette DeFaveri, Executive Director, BC Library Association
Kevin Millsip, Executive Director, BC Libraries Cooperative