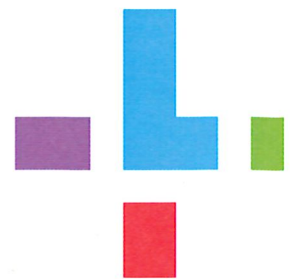


July 31, 2019

The Honorable Rob Fleming, Minister of Education  
Attention: Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services  
PO Box 9045 Stn. Prov. Govt.  
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2



Dear Committee Members,

**Re: 2020 BC Government Budget Priorities**

This submission is on behalf of Okanagan Regional Library,

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. This committee is aware of the important role of public libraries from the annual UBCM resolutions regarding provincial public library funding and from the compelling stories and evidence annually submitted to this committee from public library trustees, staff, community members, and local government officials from across the province.

We appreciate the provincial government's recognition of the public library funding issue. In 2017 the provincial government, in response to the UBCM Resolution B60, acknowledged that the cost of delivering public library services has increased with changing technology and other demands. We are heartened that we all share the understanding of the need for adequate and reliable provincial funding for public libraries.

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:

- Reconciliation initiatives that open dialogue and advance the TRC Calls to Action.
  - Several of our libraries have worked with their local First Nation communities to build library programming and partnerships, including South Shuswap Library hosting the "Four Seasons" program series partnership with the Little Shuswap Lake Indian Band and Quaaout Lodge; Kelowna Downtown Library featuring the

- NFB film club Aazibiingwashi (Wide Awake) series of films by Indigenous film makers, Reading for Reconciliation curated book lists for children and adults.
- In 2019 ORL opened our first library branch on First Nation Land in Westbank. This new facility is the result of strong relationships with the Westbank First Nation.
  - Access to materials and resources that support life-long learning.
    - Electronic resources such as Lynda.com for learning on topics as diverse as digital photography to computer coding and Rosetta Stone for language learning.
    - Conversation circles in languages including English, Spanish, Mandarin and French.
    - Computer access for distance education classes, and exam invigilation services.
  - Commitment to Equity
    - Okanagan Regional Library is committed to providing equity of access to the tools of discovering, learning, creating and connection. We welcome all, and we do our best to ensure everyone can connect to the services and materials they need
    - Accessibility Services at ORL
  - Providing Newcomers welcoming services and support for integration.
    - Newcomers: Welcome to the Okanagan Regional Library!, includes Welcome Brochures in 10 different languages.
    - New-to-BC: The Library Link for Newcomers
    - Several of our branches have on-going partnerships with their local Immigrant Support Services office to provide space for meetings with settlement workers and newcomers.
    - Kelowna Library hosted the 2018 Citizenship Ceremony, and is working with the organizers to do so again in 2019.
  - Supporting families by fostering the joy of reading and attending providing programs that support childhood and family development, and a range of literacies.
    - BC Summer Reading Club
    - STEAM Sundays, Kelowna Library
  - Innovation and new technologies
    - We provide a variety of programs to support digital literacy from basic computing, to how to use your mobile device, to confidently navigating social media
    - We have two Makerspaces that opened in 2019 providing free access to new technologies to support learning and economic development such as 3D printers, design software, recording studios, and circuitry and robotics.

Okanagan Regional Library urges 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.

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.

This year we are 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.

Your attention to this urgent issue is appreciated.

Sincerely,



**Christine McPhee, Director of Public Services**  
for Don Nettleton, CEO, Okanagan Regional Library

cc: Minister Fleming, Ministry of Education

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

