

4 April 2017

The Honourable Brad Wall, M.L.A., Premier of Saskatchewan
Legislative Building, 2405 Legislative Drive, Room 226
Regina, SK, S4S 0B3

Dear Premier Wall:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Saskatchewan Library Association (SLA). SLA's mission is to be the voice of and support to Saskatchewan's library communities. It advocates that all residents of the province have equal access to a variety of library programs and resources. My letter is in regards to the \$3.5 million loss of provincial government funding to seven of Saskatchewan's regional library systems and complete elimination (\$1.3 million) of funding to the municipal library systems in Regina and Saskatoon.

SLA acknowledges the challenges the Government of Saskatchewan faced with drafting the tabled 2017-2018 budget. I am grateful that funding for the Pahkisimon Nuye?áh Library System (PNLS) in Saskatchewan's North remains unchanged at \$974,000. However, a reduction of \$4.8 million to public libraries in the rest of the province represents approximately 0.032% of the province's total operating budget. The cost to all citizens and their communities in Saskatchewan will be enormous and likely immeasurable.

SLA is asking that the Government of Saskatchewan undertake the following:

- reconsider its budget cuts to regional and municipal public libraries
- schedule consultations immediately with regional and municipal public library directors and other key stakeholders to strategize options for future planning

Saskatchewan was a pioneer in Canada with developing a model and cost effective province-wide library system. The simultaneous passage of the Public Libraries Act and The Libraries Co-operation Act in 1996 reflected the desire of Saskatchewan's citizens to have strong and co-operative province-wide library services. In 2001, Saskatchewan was the only jurisdiction in Canada that had achieved database licensing for all provincial residents in all ten public library systems and many school libraries. Many post-secondary and special libraries are now members. At a total cost of \$623,144, the Multitype Database Licensing Program (MDLP) has provided an excellent return on investment with a projected value of \$14,876,444 throughout 2014. (Shires, 2015)

Funding cuts to public libraries are already making an impact. Effective April 4, 2017 electronic borders between Saskatchewan public libraries are closing. (Hawkesford, 2017) The availability, through Interlibrary loan, of books, DVD, audio books, magazines, online resources, and video games to all citizens has ceased. Purchasing new materials will be drastically reduced or cease altogether. Palliser Regional Library system has announced staff layoffs. Libraries will experience severely reduced hours and some will be forced to close

Libraries offer quality programs such as cultural diversification programming, ESL services for newcomers, job advancement services such as writing resume classes, tutoring and homework help, early childhood literacy, and emergency awareness programs. Libraries are also friendship centres, house local history, and display art by local talents. Libraries offer internet access to those who can't afford it and printing services for those in need. Libraries have a wealth of life-long learning opportunities for people of all ages. Scholarly research has proven that children who have compromised access to quality reading material will experience difficulties later in life. In addition, not having access to a wealth of reliable online resources for people to conduct research and leisure



activities from the comfort of their home or in a library will negatively impact the wellbeing of communities. Libraries offer incredible efficiencies and value for communities that arguably no other public space can offer. Thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



J. Michael Shires
President, Saskatchewan Library Association

cc:

The Honourable Don Morgan, Minister for Education
Mr. Trent Wotherspoon, M.L.A., Leader of the Official Opposition
Ms. Carla Beck, M.L.A., Regina Lakeview
Mr. Erin Weir, M.P., Regina-Lewvan
Honourable Ralph Goodale, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Regina-Wascana

References:

Hawkesford, Colleen. (2017). Cost-cutting forces closure of borders between libraries. *Regina Public Library*. Retrieved from <http://www.reginalibrary.ca/blogs/media/blogs/press/BordersclosedbetweenSKlibrarysystems.pdf>.

Shires, J. Michael. (2016). Celebrating Co-operation among Saskatchewan's Libraries: the Multitype Library Board, 1996-2016. *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research* 10 (2). doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v10i2.3547>

