

Manitoba Library Association



April 6, 2017

Hon. Brad Wall
233 Central Avenue North
Swift Current SK S9H 0L3
bradwallmla@sasktel.net

RE: Budget Cuts for Saskatchewan Public Libraries

Dear Premier Wall,

The Manitoba Library Association (MLA) is deeply concerned by the elimination of provincial funding for the Regina and Saskatoon municipal library systems and the \$3.5 million reduction in operational funding for 7 out of 8 regional library systems, representing 58% of their provincial funding.

By now, you may have found that cuts to public libraries are not an easy sell. You may be wondering why people are so up in arms about reducing funding to 'just' supply books. The reason is Libraries, along with the resources, people and programs within in them, have value that extends far beyond the pages and their walls. Like books, libraries open people up to whole new worlds. Libraries provide people with programs that boost multiple literacies. They provide tools for self-improvement: computer training for the elderly or undereducated, job resources for those looking to better themselves, and exposure to arts and culture for everyone willing to seek it out. Programming for children provides rich, exciting ways for families to interact with other people in their communities. E-book programs satisfy the most voracious and avid of readers.

This community enrichment has real, economic value. Indeed, libraries are consistently ranked one of the best return-on-investments for governments. They have high user satisfaction, across party lines, demographics, and socio-economic status. Studies have shown public libraries support the economy by adding value to homes and neighbourhoods, boosting spending at nearby businesses, and helping job-seekers enhance their skills.

Nationally, Saskatchewan libraries are leaders in innovation, cooperation, and cost-efficiency. The initiatives of the Multitype Library Board (MLB) and the Saskatchewan Information and Library Services (SILS) Consortium have enhanced professional development, enabled resource sharing, and streamlined user-access amongst all Saskatchewan libraries. The budget reductions jeopardize these initiatives and their benefits for Saskatchewan's citizens. In fact, we can already see the losses. The recent cancellation of the 'One Province, One Library Card' program cuts off access to thousands of resources for rural citizens.

Public libraries help fulfill commitments your Government has made to the citizens of Saskatchewan, including your Party's guiding principle of a "strong social safety net which protects those who truly need support while encouraging individuals to become self sufficient" and the Ministry of Education's commitment to "the success and well-being of all Saskatchewan learners and the enhancement of literacy for all Saskatchewan people".

Public libraries provide resources, programming, and technology that are crucial for those who truly need support. They are essential in equitable access to learning for all Saskatchewan's people. Without appropriate funding for libraries, Saskatchewan will lose the ability to build on, or even maintain, the resources and services that citizens rely on.

On behalf of the Manitoba Library Association, I urge you to reconsider these reductions and instead work collaboratively with the library community to build a socially and economically strong Saskatchewan.

Sincerely,

Alix-Rae Stefanko
President
Manitoba Library Association

cc:
Hon. Don Morgan, Minister of Education minister.edu@gov.sk.ca