

Manitoba Library Association advocates for provincial support of the Centre for Equitable Library Access

On January 11 2018 the Manitoba Library Association's Board of Directors unanimously endorsed a letter written to the Government of Manitoba advocating for the provincial support of the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) for the fiscal year beginning April 1, 2018, in order to provide CELA services to all Manitoba public libraries. Access to CELA ensures that persons with print disabilities throughout Manitoba have access to the materials and services they need.

CELA is a national non-profit organization founded on the principal of publicly-funded support of equitable public library service to Canadians with print disabilities. Since its launch on April 1, 2014, CELA has solidified its place as a sustainable and necessary public service component of its member libraries. The Government of Manitoba is one of three provinces and territories that do not currently fund CELA.

In Fall of 2017 the Nova Scotia Government announced that they will fund access to the Centre for Equitable Library Access(CELA) beginning October 1 2017. The Nova Scotia Provincial Library also provides access to accessible format collections for Nova Scotians with print disabilities through membership in the National Network for Equitable Library Services (NNELS).

The Manitoba Library Association urges the Government of Manitoba to take the appropriate action towards ensuring equitable access to public library materials for all Manitobans by funding this important organization.

The full letter is available in PDF format below.

If you have any questions or comments please contact MLA President, Alix-Rae Stefanko. president@mla.mb.ca

Manitoba Library Association



January 15, 2018

Honourable Cathy Cox
Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage
118 Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Re: Supporting funding proposal for the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) for ALL Manitobans

Dear Minister Cox,

The Manitoba Library Association is writing to you to request that the Government of Manitoba begin funding the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) for the fiscal year beginning April 1, 2018, in order to provide CELA services to all Manitoba public libraries. Access to CELA ensures that persons with print disabilities throughout Manitoba have access to the materials and services they need.

Manitobans with print disabilities deserve the same reading opportunities as other Manitobans. CELA provides these by making more than 540,000 accessible books in English and French available in the format of the reader's choice through local public libraries. CELA also provides public libraries with advice, training, and information to support their patrons' access to and use of the resources.

In Manitoba, 4 of 58 public library systems (including Winnipeg Public Library) fund CELA within their own budgets. Last fiscal year, over 50,000 items were borrowed or accessed by Manitobans who have access to CELA services through their public library. Currently, there are 182 Manitobans who are at risk of losing CELA services as of January 31, 2018 as they reside in areas in which public funding has not been designated for CELA. In addition, 38% of Manitobans live in a jurisdiction without access to CELA services.

On December 6, 2017 CELA submitted a proposal to the Ministry outlining the funding required to ensure all Manitoba public libraries, and thus all Manitobans with print disabilities, have access to CELA services. By providing central funding, the Government of Manitoba could ensure that all Manitobans have access to books. The CELA service model fulfills provincial AMA requirements and ensures equity of access to all Manitobans who have a print disability.

The Manitoba Library Association has taken the opportunity to copy Minister of Families, Scott Fielding on this letter. Given Minister Fielding's commitment to fully implementing the AMA in Manitoba and his recognition that the Province of Manitoba is a leader among Canadian jurisdictions that are introducing accessibility legislation we feel it necessary to ensure Minister Fielding is aware of the current lack of service in those areas not funded to provide CELA services. This current lack of service most deeply impacts our rural, remote and northern communities.

While Manitoba was the second province to establish an accessibility law in 2013 (Ontario was first), Nova Scotia has recently become the third province to enact legislation to remove barriers. In 2017, Nova Scotia's Communities Culture and Heritage Minister Leo Glavine announced that Nova Scotia will fund access to the

Centre for Equitable Library Access, beginning October 1, 2017¹. Like The Government of Manitoba, The Government of Nova Scotia provides access to NNELS but now recognizes that access to CELA services is also necessary for the provision of accessible and equitable service for the province.

The Manitoba Library Association recognizes the Canadian Federation of Library Association's Guidelines on Library and Information Services for People with Disabilities². In November 2017, MLA offered a well-attended half day workshop on accessibility³. MLA is deeply committed to ensuring that Manitoba library staff have this type of learning opportunity available on an ongoing basis.

Libraries in Manitoba are authentic community hubs with a focus on partnerships, creativity, technology, learning, and supporting the development of ALL residents. Libraries play an important role in ensuring the economic and social development of our communities. Therefore, equitable access is a prime concern and one that must be addressed.

The Manitoba Library Association urges the Government of Manitoba to take the appropriate action towards ensuring equitable access to public library materials for all Manitobans by funding this important organization.

Cc: Honourable Scott Fielding, Minister of Families

Respectfully submitted,

Alix-Rae Stefanko

President
Manitoba Library Association
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¹ Nova Scotia, Communities, Culture and Heritage, News Release, New Accessible Library Format Offered
September 28, 2017 11:28 AM <https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20170928002>

² Guidelines on Library and Information Services for People with Disabilities
Canadian Federation of Library Associations / Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques
<http://cfla-fcab.ca/en/guidelines-and-position-papers/guidelines-on-library-and-information-services-for-people-with-disabilities/>

³ MLA Professional Development Opportunity: Accessibility in Libraries
<http://www.mla.mb.ca/content/mla-professional-development-opportunity-accessibility-libraries>