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Manitoba Library Association

May 1, 2019

Hon. Michael Tibollo
Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport
Hearst Block
9th Floor
900 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 2A1

RE: Budget Cuts for Ontario Public Libraries

Dear Minister Tibollo,

The Manitoba Library Association (MLA) is deeply concerned by the recent announcement of a fifty percent cut to provincial funding to the Southern Ontario Library Service (SOLS) and Ontario Library Service – North (OLS-North). These agencies provide valuable support to public libraries across Ontario, particularly to rural, remote and First Nation communities.

We recognize that part of the mandate of your government was to reduce Provincial deficit, but the severe cuts in funding will have immediate and long lasting effects on many communities and people. Rather than slashing funding indiscriminately on the basis that these are not public libraries, the Province should engage in consultation with stakeholders, including citizens, public libraries and other partners, and make an informed decision as to appropriate funding.

To suggest that SOLS and OLS-North 'have no involvement in the day-to-day operations of Ontario's public libraries' does not recognize the valuable support they provide, and which is not provided by the Province: in addition to providing consultation and training, OLS-North provided postage reimbursement and SOLS provided delivery services to enable rural and more remote communities to supplement their resources. This is particularly important for these communities, which may not have reliable internet and electronic resources.

Given the news media, the grassroots signing of a petition and the activity on social media, you may be wondering why people are so outraged about reducing funding to 'just' supply books. The reason is public libraries, along with the resources, people and programs within them, have value that extends far beyond their walls. 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 our community members. 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.

Public libraries are part of the essential social and economic infrastructure for strong communities. Public libraries provide the resources and the capacity that allow communities to flourish. Libraries address community needs that are essential to the public; they are a key pillar of educational infrastructure for literacy development, lifelong learning, and community programming. Libraries help unemployed or underemployed people find jobs. They provide the community with free internet access and access to information, thus ensuring the ability for all to access services that require on-line submissions only. They are the great equalizer.

The Manitoba Library Association urges the government of Ontario to reconsider its decision to so severely cut the funding to SOLS and OLS-North, and recognize that investing in public libraries and these 'arms length agencies' which assist in providing accessible library service around the province, is an investment in the potential of the people of your province.

Sincerely,



Kerry Macdonald
President
Manitoba Library Association

Cc: Hon. Cathy Cox, Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage, Province of Manitoba
Barbara Franchetto, Chief Executive Director, Southern Ontario Library Service
Mellissa D'Onofrio-Jones, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Library Service -North
Katherine McColgan, Executive Director, Canadian Federation of Library Associations
Shelagh Paterson, Executive Director, Ontario Library Association