

Minister Cliff Cullen
Room 104 Legislative Building
Minister Kathy Cox
Room 118 Legislative Building
450 Broadway Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 0V8

February 14, 2020

To the Honourable Minister Cathy Cox and the Honourable Minister Cliff Cullen:

We are writing to encourage your administration to increase provincial funding to public libraries. Library resources, both physical and digital, increase literacy rates and provide access to educational and employment opportunities for people of all ages and demographics. The availability of remotely accessible library resources provides an incentive for people to continue living in rural areas, thereby boosting many struggling economies. Studies conducted by the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries demonstrates that every dollar invested in public library service brings over \$6.00 to the local economy.^[1]

Public libraries in Manitoba have been underfunded by the provincial government for years. The per capita provincial grant of \$8.50 has not increased since 2004, and provides a level of funding far below what is required to effectively maintain a modern library. Between inflation, rural depopulation, and the rising cost of technological advancements, many libraries now face a genuine threat to their survival. This in turn impacts library users who rely on resources and information, including new Canadians, refugees, immigrants, Indigenous people, new families, youth, and those seeking to improve themselves. Local governments have been forced to bear the bulk of the financial burden to maintain their public libraries, even though public libraries are a substantial net positive for the entire province. The Association of Manitoba Municipalities has highlighted these long standing funding issues in its 2019 meeting with Minister Cox.^[2]

Ultimately, inadequate funding for public libraries impacts the residents of Manitoba, who rely on resources and information. While public library users come from all walks of life and economic background, it is particularly impacting on those who have no other resources, including those living in rural or remote parts of the province, Indigenous persons, immigrants, youth, new families and those seeking to improve themselves.

Public libraries have made positive, tangible contributions to society for decades. Libraries continue to seize new opportunities as facilitators of digital and traditional literacy, and providers of free public spaces for gathering, learning, research, and community development. Through partnerships with schools, charities, daycares, museums, and art centres, public libraries continue to play an active role as purveyors of culture and lifelong learning.

As you develop this year's provincial budget, we ask that you consider the active role of public libraries in Manitoba's economy, and that you further consider the limited funds available to libraries at the present.

Sincerely,



Kerry Macdonald
President, Manitoba Library Association

[1] <http://fopl.ca/news/recent-ontario-public-library-economic-impact-studies/>, accessed Dec. 13, 2019

[2] http://www.amm.mb.ca/download/position_papers/2019.03.05-SPORT-CULTURE-and-HERITAGE-position-paper-Minister-Cox.pdf