



606-100 Arthur Street
Winnipeg, MB R3B 1H3

September 1, 2023

Minister Obby Khan
Department of Sport, Culture and Heritage
118 Legislative Building
450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

To the Honourable Minister Khan:

On behalf of the board and members of the Manitoba Library Association (MLA), we are sending this letter in support of the South Central Regional Library (SCRL) system, and all other Manitoba libraries who have had to deal with the growing bullying and harassing tactics of an emboldened group of individuals. This group seeks to not only censor access to certain library materials, with particular focus being on LGBTQ+ materials, but also to defund library collections which rightfully include materials on and of LGBTQ+ authors and subjects.

The Department of Sport, Culture and Heritage mission is to “contribute to a vibrant and prosperous Manitoba by celebrating, developing, supporting and promoting the identity, creativity and well-being of Manitobans, their communities and their province.” This mission includes the work performed by the Department’s Public Library Services Branch (PLSB). MLA is pleased to collaborate and work closely with PLSB with this issue of censorship and intellectual freedom facing Manitoba’s public libraries.

From the *Statement Regarding Calls for Censorship and Defunding of Public Libraries*, which can be read in full on our website, we wish to reiterate to you that MLA upholds:

- Library boards are the authority for governance and management of public libraries, and this includes developing and maintaining collection development policies for challenged materials. The authority and duties of public library boards are delegated under Manitoba’s *The Public Libraries Act*.
- Library boards in Manitoba, and throughout Canada, develop and maintain collection policies that reflect universal principles of intellectual freedom. Library boards are collectively responsible for ensuring equitable and universal access.

Further, MLA upholds:

- Library boards and library workers are best suited for selecting library materials to be made accessible to their community.
- Library users rely on their own individual decisions and judgment of what library materials to consume or not, and should raise concerns regarding library materials to their local library for consideration. Libraries are public service environments, and engagement between users and workers should take place in a manner demonstrating respect.
- Library workers are deserving of respect and civility in delivery of services.

Regional and rural libraries seek clear direction and sustained support from its Provincial government and leaders as this issue continues and in some instances escalates. However, with the PC Party recently announcing they would expand “parental rights” over what children are taught in school if re-elected, we are deeply concerned that the current government may be seeking political support from the very people who are actively attacking such an important public institution that are public libraries.

MLA condemns all calls for censorship, defunding of public libraries, and harassment of library workers. We assert that it is inappropriate, in terms of political governance and professional practice, to position municipal councils as arbitrators of library collections. We also assert that elected provincial officials must be actively supportive of public libraries in order to make known attacks on public libraries and their mandate to provide free and open access to everyone are not acceptable.

We look forward to hearing back from you, and working with you and the Department to ensure that Manitoba libraries, library workers, and library boards are meaningfully supported to perform their duties in an effective and safe manner. Manitobans deserve to have access to diverse and inclusive library collections and programming.

Yours sincerely,



President, Manitoba Library Association
president@mla.mb.ca
www.mla.mb.ca

Attachment: MLA Statement Regarding Calls for Censorship