

18 April 2017

Chief Bobby Cameron
Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations
Asimakaniseekan Askiy Reserve
Suite 100 – 103A Packham Avenue
Saskatoon, SK S7N 4K4

Dear Chief Cameron:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Saskatchewan Library Association (SLA). SLA's mission is to be the voice of and support to Saskatchewan's library communities. It advocates that all sovereign Indigenous Nations and residents of our province have equal access to a variety of library programs and resources. My letter is in regards to the \$3.5 million loss of provincial government funding to seven of Saskatchewan's regional library systems and complete elimination (\$1.3 million) of funding to the municipal library systems in Regina and Saskatoon for 2017-18.

Fortunately, provincial government funding for the Pahkisimon Nuye?áh Library System in Saskatchewan's North remains unchanged at \$974,000 for 2017-18. However, a reduction of \$4.8 million to public libraries in the rest of the province represents approximately 0.032% of the province's total operating budget. The cost to sovereign Indigenous Nations in Saskatchewan will be enormous and likely immeasurable.

SLA is asking that the Government of Saskatchewan undertake the following:

- reconsider its budget cuts to regional and municipal public libraries
- schedule consultations immediately with regional and municipal public library directors and other key stakeholders to strategize options for future planning

Saskatchewan was a pioneer in Canada with developing a model and cost effective province-wide library system. The simultaneous passage of the Public Libraries Act and The Libraries Co-operation Act in 1996 reflected the desire of sovereign Indigenous Nations and all residents of Saskatchewan to have strong and co-operative province-wide library services. In 2001, Saskatchewan was the only jurisdiction in Canada that had achieved database licensing for all provincial residents in all ten public library systems and many school libraries. Many post-secondary and special libraries became members. By 2010 all schools on reserves in Saskatchewan had access to a majority of educational databases. (Multitype Library Board, 2011) At a total cost of \$623,144, the Multitype Database Licensing Program (MDLP) has provided an excellent return on investment with a projected value of \$14,876,444 throughout 2014. (Multitype Library Board, 2015)

Funding cuts to public libraries have already made an impact. For example, Regina Public Library has no grant for providing library services to Aboriginal peoples. On April 4, 2017 resource sharing between all Saskatchewan public libraries stopped. (Hawkesford, 2017) The availability, through Interlibrary loan, of books, DVD, audio books, magazines, video games, and online resources to all sovereign Indigenous Nations and residents of Saskatchewan has ceased. For example, if a resident of La Ronge wants a book that is only available in Prince Albert then that individual would have to get the item themselves. Libraries purchasing new materials will be drastically reduced or perhaps cease altogether. Some regional library systems have announced staff layoffs. Libraries will experience severely reduced hours and some will be forced to close.



Libraries offer quality programs such as job advancement services such as writing resume classes, tutoring and homework help, early childhood literacy, and emergency awareness programs, cultural diversification programming, and ESL services for newcomers. Libraries are also friendship centres, house local history, and display art by local talents. Libraries offer internet access to those who can't afford it and printing services for those in need. Libraries have a wealth of life-long learning opportunities for people of all ages.

Scholarly research has proven that children who have compromised access to quality reading material will experience difficulties later in life. In addition, not having access to a wealth of reliable online resources to conduct research and leisure activities from the comfort of their home or in a library will negatively impact the wellbeing of their communities.

The cost per resident in Saskatchewan to maintain the province's public library system is very inexpensive. Libraries offer incredible efficiencies and value for communities that arguably no other public space can offer. SLA has a Save Public Libraries resource page at <http://saskla.ca> that has information about the value of libraries. SLA asks that the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations join the call for the provincial government to restore funding to public libraries and to work with leaders of libraries and key stakeholders in Sovereign Indigenous Nations and other communities to help create a sustainable plan for the future of public libraries in Saskatchewan.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



J. Michael Shires
President, Saskatchewan Library Association

References:

Hawkesford, Colleen. (2017). Cost-cutting forces closure of borders between libraries. *Regina Public Library*. Retrieved from <http://www.reginalibrary.ca/blogs/media/blogs/press/BordersclosedbetweenSKlibrarysystems.pdf>.

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