



:. ontario library association

The Honorable Eleanor McMahon, Minister  
Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport  
9th Floor, Hearst Block  
900 Bay Street  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2E1

August 24, 2016

Dear Minister McMahon,

We are writing to express our concern regarding the recent decision to reduce broadband funding for public libraries through the Connectivity Fund, which is administered by the Southern Ontario Library Service and Ontario Library Service-North. While we understand the fiscal challenges our province faces, this reduction, combined with other government cuts, will severely affect the ability of small and mid-sized libraries across Ontario to offer equity of service to meet the needs of citizens in the knowledge economy.

Connectivity funding is crucial to offset the high cost of broadband access in Canada in order to bridge the “digital divide”. While this is an issue in all communities and for all public libraries in Ontario, we are most concerned with the impact these cuts will have on small and rural communities in Ontario, where broadband penetration at the household level continues to be low, often more expensive and slower than in large urban centres. Thus, the people in these communities often rely heavily on access to the Internet at their local public library.

We cannot overestimate the impact relative to cost of high-speed connectivity to public libraries, where it is an essential part of service delivery. One mid-sized library recently conducted a survey of the impact of community Internet access, finding that, for example, 8% of respondents had used library computers to successfully find a job. And we must also emphasize the particular importance of broadband access to libraries serving First Nations communities, where it helps preserve Indigenous culture and combat isolation, and in Francophone centres, where it connects people to services in both official languages.

Libraries provide essential services requiring dedicated broadband support including:

- Pre-screening centres to allow for job seekers to avoid travelling to a larger city;
- Online exam proctoring;
- Access to high-quality online studies leading to certificates or degrees, often at an affordable cost and on a flexible schedule, allowing students to continue working while studying;
- Access to e-government services, including at dedicated Service Canada outlets;
- 24-hour access to the Internet for purposes such as education, social inclusion, employment, and health matters.

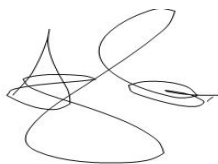
In addition to the recent decision to reduce broadband support, there have been two additional cuts that adversely affect the provision of digital services. These include:

- Federal: changes to the Industry Canada (now Innovation, Science, and Economic Development Canada) Youth Internship Program. For twenty years, this program provided connectivity and hardware funding (this portion was discontinued in 2012) and funds for summer youth employment experience in the training and delivery of e-services. In 2014, the terms of this program changed resulting in small and mid-sized libraries becoming ineligible.
- Provincial: the Ministry decision to cease a dedicated e-resource fund that enabled significant cost savings in consortia purchasing and ensured that all public libraries in Ontario could offer a base-line selection of electronic information resources.

These three cuts within the last two years have removed thousands of dollars from public library operating budgets, forcing small and mid-sized libraries to reduce other valuable services and programs.

We recognize the financial challenges our government faces and will continue to advocate at the provincial level about the ways in which libraries act as essential digital hubs for all Ontarians, and contribute positively to the social, cultural and economic well-being of communities.

Best Regards,



Todd Kyle, president

Cc Alexandra Yarrow, president, Ontario Public Library Association  
Pierre Mercier, president, Ontario Library Boards' Association  
Kevin Finnerty, ADM, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport

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