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December 13, 2017

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

RE: Ontario First Nation Public Libraries: Needs Assessment Report

Dear Minister McMahon,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Ontario Library Association's Indigenous Task Group to congratulate your Ministry on the release of the Ontario First Nation Public Libraries: Needs Assessment Report in October 2017.

Founded in 1900, the Ontario Library Association (OLA) is the oldest continually operating non-profit library association in Canada. We represent more than 5,000 members, and offer free membership to every First Nations Public Library in the province. As you know, First Nations communities require public libraries just as much as any other community. There are 133 First Nations communities in Ontario. Of these, only 46 have public libraries. Public libraries often serve as an accessible gathering place and information sharing resource for many First Nations communities, where they exist and there is broad recognition and support for the concept of continuing education at the community level as well as increased accessibility to all educational outlets, including public libraries.

In 2015, OLA established an Indigenous Task Group. The purpose of the OLA Indigenous Task Group is to:

- Develop an OLA strategy to strengthen First Nation Libraries in Ontario, including raising awareness about the opportunities and challenges of accessing library services for First Nation people.
- Ensure communities are aware of funding opportunities and other supports to establish libraries on reserve.

The Indigenous Task Group's Chair, Feather Maracle Luke, was the Yellow Team Leader of the *Canadian Federation of Library Associations' Truth & Reconciliation Committee*, and played a key role in drafting the Committee's Report and Recommendations [<http://cfla-fcab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Truth-and-Reconciliation-Committee-Report-and-Recommendations.pdf>]. This Report noted several key issues facing Indigenous communities and libraries, including access to technology infrastructure, staff capacity and training, and collection development.

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ontario library association
2 Toronto Street, 3rd Floor
toronto, ontario, canada
m5c 2b6

a member of ^{the} PARTNERSHIP

phone: 416.363.3388
:. toll-free: 1.866.873.9867
fax: 416.941.9581
:. toll-free: 1.800.387.1181
email: info@accessola.com
web: www.accessola.com



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We were pleased to see reflected in the Ontario First Nation Public Libraries Needs Assessment Report an acknowledgement of these key challenges and the four recommendations to address these barriers:

- 1) Improved funding structures, formulas and supports
 - a) Implement a new funding structure and process
 - b) Consider other funding for operational funding
 - c) Provide funding support for additional staff
- 2) Support the management, preservation and revitalization of First Nation languages and cultural resources and programming
- 3) Improved Coordination and Advocacy
 - a) Bring northern and southern library staff together more frequently
 - b) Coordinate with other Ontario Ministries and the Federal government for funding and support to FNPLs
 - c) Advocate for and support broadband Internet access for all First Nations in Ontario
- 4) Streamline and simplify reporting processes and expand eligible expenses.

OLA's Indigenous Task Group strongly supports the 4 key recommendations noted in this Needs Assessment Report and is ready to work with the province to support their implementation.

As noted in your report, First Nation Public Libraries are "vital centres for access to cultural activities and language revitalization in ways that are distinct from non-Indigenous public libraries." They require appropriate funding, training and staffing approaches to be able to overcome the barriers that exist to establishing and maintain these vital institutions.

We appreciate your leadership in recognizing these barriers and your increased support for First Nation Public Libraries across the province.

Sincerely,

Feather Maracle Luke, Chair
OLA Indigenous Task Group

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2 Toronto Street, 3rd Floor
toronto, ontario, canada
m5c 2b6

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OLA's Indigenous Task Group

Feather Maracle Luke, Timmins Public Library (Chair)

Don Lynch, Six Nations Public Library

Alicia Kilgour, Niagara Falls Public Library

Sheri Mishibinijima, Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve

Alexandra Yarrow, Ottawa Public Library

Kate Johnson-McGregor, Grand Erie District School Board

Angel Maracle, Chiefs of Ontario

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m5c 2b6

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