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June 19, 2017

Open Letter: APLA's Response to EY's *Organizational and Service Review of the Newfoundland and Labrador Public Library System*

Dear Premier:

The Atlantic Provinces Library Association (APLA) has been following the public library situation in Newfoundland and Labrador since the provincial government proposed the closure of 54 of the province's libraries in April of 2016, followed by the implementation of the only book tax in Canada. In the months that followed these announcements, APLA—as a voice for libraries and library workers in Atlantic Canada—joined other Canadian provincial and regional library associations in advocating for the importance and relevance of Newfoundland and Labrador's public libraries, writing letters, issuing press releases, and holding events at annual conferences. APLA has been anxiously-awaiting the final report of EY, highlighting the results of the NLPL review, and we write this letter to emphasize the following thoughts and recommendations, going forward.

Firstly, we are pleased to see the acknowledgement of the history of chronic underfunding with which the public libraries have had to survive (42% below the national average). We also appreciate the knowledge that Newfoundland and Labrador's Provincial Government "provides almost all of NLPL's funding," which is more than twice the national average (p. 4), and the recommendation that these funding models be revisited by inviting municipalities to participate in a shared funding model. In consideration of the unique financial position and ability of each municipality, our hope is that these numbers and recommendations will pave the way for a more reasonable distribution of funding responsibility, as well as a more generous allotment of funds overall for the Newfoundland and Labrador's Public Library system.

Secondly, we fully support Recommendation 9 to “increase the number of professional librarians in the NLPL and define their roles and responsibilities” (p. 7). At the same time, we regret that there is no mention in the recommendations of the need for more support staff who are also critical to the successful operation of the library system.

While the report does state in Recommendation 2, that “the Provincial Board should optimize the use of its limited funding by reassessing [and] adjusting the number and locations of public libraries in the Province,” we ask that the Provincial Government take great care to ensure that this recommendation is carried out wisely. It is crucial that the province’s rural communities retain access to their libraries, to reading materials, the internet, educational materials and programs, senior’s programs, and employment resources. Short distances between libraries as a justification for closing ignores certain considerations such as a lack of public or personal transportation, mobility issues, ferry systems, and weather. In these hard economic times, libraries and easy access to libraries are needed more than ever.

APLA strongly encourages and implores the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to act on Recommendation 8, first and foremost. At this crossroads, it is imperative that a knowledgeable, qualified, full-time Professional Head Librarian (with a Master’s degree from an accredited school of Library and Information Science, along with some years of management experience) be hired immediately to ensure that the process is influenced and backed by the appropriate qualifications and expertise. This position should be filled through an external search process. Only after this position is filled should work begin on the strategic planning process that will seek to address the recommendations of the report.

Overall, we are encouraged by this review. What the NLPL needs is an increase and redistribution of funding, as well as stronger leadership, to be accomplished with an increased complement of professional librarians (as recommended in the report) lead by a visionary new Head Librarian. Together with the NLPL’s strong complement of professional and dedicated library assistants and workers, the NLPL may reach its full potential.

Sincerely,



Kathryn Rose
APLA President 2017-18

Cc: Hon. Dale Kirby, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development
Members of the House of Assembly