

NLHLA

Newfoundland and Labrador Health Libraries Association



The Honourable Dale Kirby, M.H.A.
Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development
3rd Floor, West Block
Confederation Building
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL
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November 7, 2016

Dear Minister Kirby,

On behalf of the Executive and the members of the Newfoundland and Labrador Health Libraries Association (NLHLA), I urge you to reconsider the proposed fiscal cuts and closures to our public libraries. In addition, NLHLA is concerned by the highly restrictive nature of the library system review.

Based upon the outcry against the proposed cuts and closures, it is clear many recognise the public library's critical role in promoting and protecting general literacy, upon which health literacy is fundamentally dependant. As Dr. Don Nutbeam states in his article "Health Literacy as a Public Health Goal: A Challenge for Contemporary Health Education and Communication Strategies into the 21st Century": "strategies to promote health literacy will remain inextricably tied to more general strategies to promote literacy."

Health literacy – defined as one's capacity to obtain, process, and understand the information that pertains to one's own health and well-being – is fundamentally dependent upon literacy. Increasingly, people are seeking reliable health information online. While this is no substitute for being seen by a medical professional, seeking authoritative medical information is an important component of self-care. Librarians and library staff help our citizens develop their health literacy, providing guidance and assisting in the evaluation of potential sources for consumer health information. Our public library system is a cornerstone in keeping people both well-informed and in better health.

Newfoundland and Labrador has particularly low literacy rates, among the lowest in the country. In that light, the threatened cuts to our province's libraries are baffling, as they further hinder the already limited capacity to provide free and universal

access to books, internet services, programming, and information professionals. These impending cuts are of particular concern, given the Newfoundland and Labrador Public Library System has already experienced significant cuts in staffing and operating budgets in recent years. The 2013 budget eliminated \$1.2 million in funding for public libraries, laying off five of only fourteen professionally trained librarians for the NLPL System despite public outcry. This decision necessarily resulted in fewer services, with only nine librarians remaining to provide planning, direction and service to the 530,128 people of our province.

We argue that, given recent cuts to an already underfunded service, the decision to make such radical funding cuts to the public library system will be to the detriment of the people of the province.

In principle, we agree with the consultation of the general public, a process which is currently under way by the EY firm. However we see flaws in the consultation process which worry us as librarians. These concerns include: the lack of public roundtable consultations in the communities whose libraries are threatened with closure; the very limited number of those identified as stakeholders and brought into Stakeholder roundtable consultations; the highly proscribed nature of the three question format of the online response form – questions which do not allow citizens to properly express their concerns.

On behalf of the Executive and the members of NLHLA, I would be happy to meet with you and discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,



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cc. Hon. Dwight Ball, Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador
Lindsay Alcock, President of Canadian Health Libraries Association
Krista Godfrey, President of Newfoundland and Labrador Library Association
Library Services Review, c/o Ernst & Young LLP