



Vancouver Public Library
Office of the Chair

June 26, 2020

Attention: Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

Dear Committee Members,

Re: 2021 BC Government Budget Priorities

This submission is on behalf of the Vancouver Public Library Board. We would like to thank the provincial government for the leadership it has shown helping people in British Columbia navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

Every day in our communities, we see firsthand the need for strong public services and social infrastructure. Throughout this crisis, B.C. public libraries have continued to serve communities - assisting those most vulnerable to access government forms and assistance, providing entertainment and connection to those who feel isolated, and ensuring equitable access to online resources and learning opportunities that our communities rely on for today and for their future well-being. For all British Columbians, public libraries make life more affordable, improve access to services that people count on, and support the development and rebuilding of strong and sustainable economies.

In times of economic upheaval and uncertainty, public libraries are critically important community infrastructure.

In March 2020, the Province announced a one-time infusion of \$3 million for public libraries across B.C. We were heartened by this announcement and the \$47,253 that Vancouver Public Library received to invest in digital services to our patrons. This one-time grant will enable Vancouver Public Library to expand our exceptionally popular digital programming for children and families that launched during our closures, and to better support our community with technology during and post COVID-19. We have been welcoming approximately 1,000 participants to our daily digital storytimes for children, and we look forward to continuing to create accessible, engaging digital programs for all ages.

And yet, more needs to be done to ensure that public libraries are able to meet the increasingly complex demands of their communities and to support the recently released *B.C.'s Strategic Plan for Public Library Service*. In 2019, Vancouver Public Library's annual provincial operating grant was

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\$1,240,007, reduced by \$49,755 from the 2018 grant. This reduced the provincial contribution from 2.43% of the overall VPL operating budget to 2.29%. This grant remained the same in 2020.

We realize there are immense pressures on all levels of government and we appreciate that this year there will be many compelling demands on the 2021 budget. Public libraries are also in need, and have not seen an increase in core provincial funding since 2010. It is imperative that the provincial government demonstrate a commitment in the 2021 budget that addresses this growing gap in provincial funding to public libraries and the need for reliable and sustained annual funding increases.

While we continue to advocate for sustained and reliable annual increases to the provincial operating grant for public libraries, this year, as a demonstrated commitment from the provincial government and in support of our shared strategic goals, we are asking for a one-time \$3 million investment in province-wide training and professional development for public library staff and boards. In Vancouver, our priority in this area would be training that supports our 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, in particular the goal *"Foster an inclusive workplace that reflects the diversity of our community."*

2020 has been an unprecedented period of uncertainty for British Columbians and the 2021 budget will, of necessity, be concerned with rebuilding local economies and the well-being of individuals, families, and communities throughout B.C. Public libraries, like other critically important public services, are an integral part of BC community social and economic infrastructure and as such are in need of provincial support and investment.

Investing in B.C. public libraries is investing in B.C. communities for everyone.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Chan
Chair, Library Board

cc: Minister Fleming, Ministry of Education
The BC Public Library Partners:
Scott Hargrove, Chair, Association of BC Public Library Directors
Babs Kelly, Executive Director, BC Library Trustees Association
Annette DeFaveri, Executive Director, BC Library Association
Kevin Millsip, Executive Director, BC Libraries Cooperative

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