



Vancouver Public Library

*Office of the Chair*

October 15, 2018

1030 Denman Street  
Suite 112  
Vancouver, British Columbia  
V6G 2M6

Dear Honorable Hedy Fry:

The Vancouver Public Library is urging The Government of Canada to provide funding for the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) for alternate format production. CELA is the organization that enables public libraries to provide collections in accessible formats to the nearly 3.5 million Canadians with print disabilities. CELA is a collaboration of many stakeholders committed to the provision of accessible public library service at the highest level possible. Since the spring of 2014 the service has grown into an essential public library service.

Vancouver Public Library can see the impact that CELA is making first hand. CELA has proven it is possible to offer Canadians and Vancouverites with print disabilities local access to equitable library service – a service Vancouver Public Library could not offer within our staffing and budgetary capacity without CELA's existence. This service is essential in helping us meet our accessibility commitments to our residents with print disabilities.

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Vancouver Public Library has committed to CELA since 2014 and recommitted with the ambitious strategic plan approved in January of 2017. The goals are commendable and necessary for a truly integrated, equitable public library service for Canadians with print disabilities; specifically, Goal 2 to build a robust alternative format collection and Goal 4 to broaden CELA's reach to Canadians with print disabilities.

CELA has the full backing of the Canadian Urban Libraries Council / Conseil des Bibliothèques Urbaines du Canada (CULC/CBUC) of which Vancouver Public Library is a proud member. CULC/CBUC strives to strengthen our vibrant urban communities through building the capacity of Canada's urban libraries. Its 45-member systems have over 7.5 million active users, operate almost 700 points of access, and in 2016 were used by Canadians more than 385,000,000 times. CULC/CBUC member libraries employ almost 13,000 Canadians. Member libraries represent approximately 80% of the country's public library activity.

An estimated 10% of the Canadian population has a print disability and would be eligible for CELA. In the city of Vancouver, it is estimated that approximately 60,000 residents have a print disability and qualify for CELA service.

Vancouver Public Library is able to offer an expanded selection of titles through our CELA subscription that would not be possible otherwise. Our residents with print disabilities have access to an



additional 500,000 items through CELA, including newspapers, magazines, and books in accessible formats such as audio, e-text and braille. CELA is responsive to requests from our community of users and acquires titles as requested to ever-expand the collection.

The variety of formats that CELA is able to secure for library users is valued by our community of users. With limited access to accessible formats, public libraries rely heavily on the collection CELA has been able to develop, allowing us to offer our users with print disabilities options that, even as a large library system, we would be unable to develop on our own. For example, we worked with a care facility in the community to provide a bookclub, and our access to the CELA collection meant we could provide the titles in a variety of formats, including braille, to meet the various abilities of the participants. This allowed individuals to be able to participate with others in their community without a barrier to the reading materials. Until we joined CELA, braille was not a format available to our library users due to cost and storage restrictions.

CELA has also been able to work with publishers to secure reproduction access to popular material, giving our users with print disabilities faster access to material than conventional publishing and distribution channels for non-print formats. It is estimated only 5-7% of North American published material is available in alternative formats for people with print disabilities. Without CELA's work to make published content available in



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multiple formats, cultural works would never be accessible to a significant and growing population.

The process for registering new users has also been simplified during CELA's oversight, giving people who already have obstacles to reading materials an easier registration process. This has allowed new users to connect with CELA's collection easily and quickly.

If there is further information that we can offer in support of CELA, please feel free to contact me directly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'K.E.' with a stylized flourish.

Kyla Epstein, Chair  
Vancouver Public Library Board

Cc:

Hon. Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Public Services and  
Procurement and Accessibility

Hon. Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance

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