



## **Select Standing Committee on Finance & Government Services 2022 ABCPLD Presentation**

### **Introduction**

Thank you for having me. My name is Leigh Anne Palmer and I have the privilege of addressing you today from the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. I am here today representing the Association of BC Public Library Directors. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today in collaboration with the BC Library Trustees Association, the BC Library Association, and the BC Libraries Cooperative.

### **The context**

In a world that is increasingly unaffordable, where citizens feel isolated from each other, and where the future looks uncertain due to the climate crisis, libraries play a critical role. We are a community hub, open to all, providing free spaces and services that build skills, nurture a sense of belonging, and provide a refuge from climate emergency events.

Libraries are essential - we are one of the few places where you don't have to buy anything to be there. And as costs for everything soar, we are busier than ever. Over the past 10 years we have expanded our services to meet the many and diverse needs of our communities:

Libraries offer a safe and confidential place to explore new ideas. We make referrals and create connections for people struggling to emerge from poverty, abuse, or addiction; and, we provide space for civic engagement and discourse on the issues that challenge our society.

Libraries are open to JOB SEEKERS and small BUSINESS OWNERS - providing access to computers for job searching and resources like LinkedInLearning that help them develop the skills they need to land a job, build a business, and provide for themselves and their families.

Libraries are open to NEWCOMERS. We provide connections to services that support immigrants as they navigate the complexities of settlement, connect with the community, and build lives in Canada.

Libraries are open to FAMILIES - providing safe spaces for youth to gather and build literacy skills that will benefit themselves and their communities as they move through their lives.

Libraries are open to EVERYONE. When our province has been rocked by climate emergency events - wildfires, heat domes, floods - our doors have been open welcoming British Columbians in from the elements; helping them connect with the services they need to stay safe or rebuild their lives.

We are truly privileged to be that constant resource, welcoming everyone and making them feel at home while we connect them with information, technology, and others in their community.

## **The ask**

While over the past 10 years, we have expanded our services to help more people, we've had to do this work with less funding.

In 2009, public library funding was drastically cut 25% to approximately 14 million dollars. Since that time, public libraries have not seen an increase to our base grant funding. We are grateful for the one-time CRR funding the province provided to help lessen some of the costs we incurred over the pandemic; but that funding is only a temporary support. The fundamental gaps remain and indeed grow each year as operating this critical social infrastructure becomes more expensive.

Libraries across BC, small and large, urban and rural, are all facing challenges. Some are struggling to keep buildings and services open due to skyrocketing costs of operating, staffing, providing print and digital collections. Others are facing significant challenges in equipping their staff with the tools they need to help those struggling with mental health and addiction issues, while still providing a welcoming space for others in our community.

The events of the last 2 years have demonstrated the ways in which libraries have been stalwart partners, working tirelessly to meet the priorities of government and citizens across the province. Adequately funded, think of what we could do!

I think we all agree: British Columbians shouldn't have to buy a cup of coffee to access high-speed internet. No child in our province should go without a new bedtime story because of the cost of a book. Everyone in our province deserves a place to go, free of charge, to weather a storm. With that in mind, it is increasingly difficult to understand why library services have not warranted an increase to our base grant funding in 13 years.

We ask you to think about the value derived from the government's existing contribution to BC's public libraries and all that we do to support British Columbians. With this in mind, we ask for your commitment of \$23M in 2023, as well as ongoing incremental increases so that we can continue and improve our ability to meet the needs of individuals, families, and communities across the province when their need is greater than ever.

## **Closing**

We are here asking for your support. On behalf of the Association of BC Public Library Directors and the BC Library Partners, I thank you for this opportunity to share what libraries are doing for BC communities and for considering an increase to our funding in 2023.