

**A Brief for the Honourable Shirley Bond**  
**Minister of Education, Deputy Premier and**  
**Minister Responsible for Early Learning and Literacy**

**Submitted by the British Columbia Library Trustees' Association**  
**4 September 2008**



Our Association represents 70 library boards and over 675 library trustees around the province of British Columbia. Library trustees are responsible for governing BC's public libraries – including setting policy and direction, strategic planning, budgeting, fundraising and promoting library services and programs. On behalf of our membership, we wish to raise the following topics with the Minister today:

- 1) Thank you for provincial support;
- 2) Partnerships and shared-use facilities;
- 3) Library highway sign campaign; and
- 4) Bill C61.

**Thank you for Provincial Support**

On behalf of our members, we wish to convey our thanks for the Minister's leadership on library issues and her understanding of the crucial role that public libraries play in our society. We are likewise pleased at the interest the Deputy and Assistant Deputy Minister of Education have taken in the library sector – our thanks to them both for taking the time to meet with our Executive Director and public library representatives this past summer. We extend another sincere thank you to the members of the Public Library Services Branch, who have been of great assistance over the last year – as in years past. Of late, the Branch has expanded its assistance with our Trustee Orientation Program and has indicated a willingness to work with us in providing ongoing training to trustees around the province; it has played a crucial role in important partnership initiatives such as Library 2020; it has fostered economies of scale through SITKA and the multi-sector database licensing initiative; and it continues to support public libraries through staff training, virtual reference services, and general assistance wherever and whenever required. We can't say enough about the value of this very important Branch of government.

As in years past, our Association's primary responsibility is to advocate to the Ministry on behalf of our members and their libraries. However, before we convey our concerns and make our requests, allow us to thank you for the additional library funding and special initiatives launched under the Strategic Plan

for public libraries. Here are a few good news stories from around the province which show the value of this investment:

- Equity Grants have enabled the Richmond Public Library to purchase much-needed critical literacy and ESL materials for both children and adults; and Technology Grants have provided the means to build and equip a computer learning centre for the library.
- Surrey Public Library has used provincial funding to initiate programs such as “Reading Buddies” and “Ready to Read” – fostering positive interaction between teens and children; and “Electronic Classrooms” – providing technology training to new computer users.
- In Fort Nelson, a Mother Goose program was developed with the Equity Grant and was so successful in 2007 it saw registration of upwards of 50 people per session.
- Provincial funding has helped establish the Vancouver Public Library’s Skilled Immigrant InfoCentre – a free service that provides all recent skilled immigrants to BC with customized employment information in order to help them find work in their chosen field.
- The North Coast Library Federation has been extremely successful in pooling the efforts and resources of public libraries in the region – improving their purchasing power, delivering better services and streamlining their circulation and cataloguing systems. So successful have their efforts been, in fact, that collaboration has begun to spread across sectors and Northwest Community College is now on board as an associate member of the Federation.

Stories like these demonstrate how well libraries use the provincial funds with which they are entrusted. We would ask the Minister to think big in terms of what could still be done under the Strategic Plan renewal; and to continue to see the public library sector as a place where the investment of provincial dollars results in invaluable long-term gains for children, parents, seniors, immigrants, job seekers, and the province as a whole in terms of improved overall literacy, access to information, and community engagement. It is no wonder that libraries enjoy such strong support among the public – held in equal esteem with fire and ambulance services, and sometimes surpassing even these.

### **Partnerships and Shared-use Facilities**

BCLTA supports fully the trend to explore partnerships with education boards, community centres and local governments in establishing shared-use facilities – such as the Elementary School/Community Centre/Public Library building recently completed in Pouce Coupe. (Please also accept our thanks for the generous Towns for Tomorrow funding allocated to the library portion of the Pouce Coupe shared-use facility.) Our Association believes in the enhanced efficiencies and economies of scale created through these partnerships; and we acknowledge that they are in keeping with the general trend toward cross-sector cooperation and communication promoted in the provincial Strategic Plan for Public Libraries. The movement also fits well with the recently announced goal of establishing “Neighbourhoods of Learning” throughout the province, and we believe libraries merit a place within this concept.

We would suggest, however, that there is a need to monitor these early partnerships in order to ensure their continued effectiveness and to learn from the successes and challenges faced by early adopters. Our members have communicated a few growing pains from the library perspective – including the

challenge of maintaining library autonomy and separate governance and administration in these public buildings. A review of existing joint-use facilities a year or two down the road would no doubt provide some valuable “lessons learned” which we could then share with communities, schools and libraries looking to enter into similar partnerships. BCLTA would be interested in surveying the library community, perhaps in conjunction with the Ministries of Education and Community Development surveying school boards and local governments. The results would be invaluable to all sectors in understanding successful strategies for integration, challenges overcome and possible outstanding issues in need of attention. We would also volunteer the collective expertise of our Board in the event that a prospective partner library is looking for guidance in entering into a shared-use situation – something we will be communicating to our membership and which we wish the Ministry and the Public Library Services Branch to keep in mind. We are happy to assist in whatever way we can to ensure that these partnership and neighbourhood arrangements are successful.

### **Library Highway Sign Campaign**

As you may be aware from recent correspondence, BCLTA is conducting a campaign to have library directional signs installed along highways throughout the province. Several communities (e.g., Tumbler Ridge, Yale) already have these signs in place, but it is proving to be a struggle to secure additional signage despite widespread support among the library community. We have written to the Premier; the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts; the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure; and to Tourism BC – all to no avail so far. We request your assistance in this campaign, which would not only direct travelers to local libraries to take advantage of free internet access, OneCard borrowing privileges, and other library services and programs, but would also raise the general profile of public libraries and hence of literacy. After all, for many people, libraries are already as basic a requirement as gas, food and lodging – just think if this was the case for even more British Columbians.

### **Bill C61**

Lastly, BCLTA would like to draw the Minister’s attention to the potential impact of Bill C61 on the library sector. This piece of legislation has the capacity to severely limit the statutory rights of library users by restricting access to digital materials and impeding the electronic delivery of interlibrary loans. While ostensibly intended to bring Canada more into alignment with American copyright laws (and in large part reacting to online music piracy), this Bill will have unintended consequences for public libraries. Electronic delivery of library materials and the provision of digital content is a cost effective way to reach today’s internet savvy public, and just one more way that libraries can encourage literacy and lifelong learning. How can we continue to maintain our relevance within our limited budgets if we are prevented from taking advantage of the efficiencies of technology? We would encourage the Minister and the Public Library Services Branch to make representation to the federal government regarding the impact of Bill C61, and we would be more than happy to support this process.