

**A Brief for the Honourable Dr. Margaret MacDiarmid
Minister of Education and Minister Responsible for
Early Learning and Literacy**

**Submitted by the BC Library Trustees Association, the BC Library Association
and the Association of BC Public Library Directors**

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Our three associations represent public libraries, library boards and library staff throughout British Columbia. Together we advocate for and support BC's library community – speaking out on issues of concern to public libraries, providing training and professional development for our members, answering questions and undertaking research on public library-related issues, and assisting the Public Library Services Branch with its outreach and service activities. Jointly and individually, we have a longstanding and mutually beneficial relationship with the provincial government – a relationship we hope to solidify in the months and years to come.

There are several issues we'd like to touch on in this brief and in our upcoming meeting, including:

- Public library funding in the 2009 Budget and beyond;
- Funding cuts to the associations;
- Opportunities to move forward;
- Neighbourhood Centres for Learning and Development;
- Appreciation for the work of the Public Library Services Branch.

Public Library Funding in the 2009 Budget and Beyond

As has been previously communicated, we very much appreciate the Minister's efforts to preserve provincial funding to BC's public libraries in the 2009 Budget. In these difficult economic times, we recognize that tough decisions and sacrifices must be made; but we feel the Minister understands the crucial role that libraries play during economic downturns. Libraries not only mitigate the impact of tough economic times on their patrons...they are also key players in economic stimulation and recovery. British Columbians are turning to the library now more than ever for help with job searching, small business development, early learning opportunities, and to take advantage of the many free programs, services and resources on offer at facilities throughout the province. Maintaining provincial funding to public libraries just makes sense, and we thank you for communicating this to Government on our behalf.

We also appreciate the Minister's sensitivity to the special challenges faced by rural and small libraries across BC. Uniform cuts would have been devastating to some of our smaller facilities, so we're pleased to see that 55 of our most vulnerable libraries will experience cuts of only one to three per cent. In addition, continued provincial funding to the library federations will be crucial to seeing our members through these difficult times – we commend the Ministry for its foresight in maintaining federation funding.

As for cuts affecting province-wide initiatives such as AskAway virtual reference and multi-sector database licensing, we can advise that libraries around the province – individually and collectively – are considering how to proceed. It is clear that there will be service reductions as a result of these and other provincial funding decisions, and it is likely that these impacts will be felt most keenly among BC's smaller libraries...despite best efforts to cushion the blow.

In the long term, we expect that provincial funding to libraries will not only be restored to previous levels – but increased to reflect and support the increased library usage we are seeing. It is likely that there will be significant service reductions arising from 2010 municipal budgets in the current economic climate, and it is therefore crucial that per capita grants and other provincial library supports be restored and, if at all possible, increased in the 2010/11 provincial budget. Public libraries are fundamental to achieving provincial literacy goals, and we are confident that BC will do its best to match the level of funding provided by other Canadian provinces – several of which have actually increased their support for libraries during the present economic downturn.

Funding Cuts to the Associations

While we appreciate the Minister's efforts to preserve funding to libraries across the province, we feel it is our responsibility to advise that cutbacks to library association funding will have a serious impact on the level of service that we will be able to provide to our respective members and to the provincial government.

In the case of BCLTA, the flagship Trustee Orientation Program will now be offered on a cost-recovery basis only, which will particularly impact the ability of smaller, more remote libraries to host orientation sessions for new library board members. In addition, the elimination of the grant supporting BCLTA's Executive Director and the significant operating grant reduction means the association's two part-time staff will be operating at less than half their previous capacity for the foreseeable future. This will affect BCLTA's overall ability to provide services to trustees – including maintaining a BCLTA presence at library sector meetings, contributing to the annual BC Library Conference, hosting the annual BC Library Reception at UBCM, advocating on behalf of the library sector, supporting individual trustees and library boards with requests for assistance and information, and liaising with sister associations and the provincial government.

For BCLA, the reduction in the annual operating grant, coupled with the changes to administrative fees could well result in a need to assess the viability of having two full-time staff. A reduction in paid staff hours will have similar impacts on members as those outlined above with regard to BCLTA. BCLA's ability to subsidize programs for members – training workshops or bringing in top caliber speakers, for example – will be compromised. In addition, the association will not be able to continue with WebJunction BC – a jointly developed online training and information resource for BC's library community. Without PLSB's

contribution to the subscription, BCLA cannot assume the full cost, particularly given reduced revenue. This is particularly disappointing, as WJBC represented a successful collaboration among three associations and PLSB.

For ABCPLD, the complete discontinuation of provincial funding will impact the ability to provide library directors with an opportunity to meet in-person to discuss matters important to them; provide focused professional development opportunities; and cooperate with the BCLTA and BCLA to advocate for a strong public library system.

In short, the support functions provided by our three associations to BC's library community and to the provincial government will be seriously hindered by these funding reductions.

Opportunities to move forward

Despite the challenges outlined above, all three associations are focused on moving forward and working in partnership with the Ministry on initiatives such as the pending Library Act Review and the Strategic Plan for Public Libraries. Both projects are crucial to maintaining a healthy library service in BC and we seek timely information from the Province as each moves forward. Our associations have worked with PLSB to provide detailed input from the library community to assist in the legislative review process and we have also lent our collective voice to the Strategic Plan renewal. We now offer our assistance and support in seeing them through to conclusion. In these and other initiatives intended to bolster and improve BC's public library system, the Minister can count on our cooperation.

Neighbourhood Centres for Learning and Development

Neighbourhood Learning Centres were most recently referenced in the August 25th Speech from the Throne – though with very little explanatory detail:

“Neighbourhood learning centres will become the focus of intensive activities with city councils, library boards, recreation commissions, parents and professionals. Government will work to establish educational and preschool opportunities in the midst of the neighbourhoods where our families live. Together, we can work to centre neighbourhoods and communities on the needs of our families, their children's education and the environment.” (www.leg.bc.ca/39th1st/4-8-39-1.htm)

We would appreciate additional information about these centres, how they are intended to interface with local public libraries, and what we can do to prepare our members for their emergence.

Thank you to the Public Library Services Branch

As always, we wish to end by thanking the Public Library Services Branch for the integral role it plays in supporting BC's library community. PLSB staffs are always available to assist our members with inquiries and issues as they arise, and to provide staff training and participate in trustee orientation sessions around the province. The Branch has been crucial to fostering economies of scale through initiatives such as SITKA and multi-sector database licensing, and plays a key role in bringing the various players in

the library community together to work on mutually beneficial projects and initiatives. The value of the guidance and leadership provided by this very important Branch of government cannot be overstated, and we look forward to a continued productive working relationship with PLSB.