

BCLTA

To develop and support library trustees to advance public library service in British Columbia.

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
December 13, 2005



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“To make BC the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent.”

Speech from The Throne, September 12, 2005

Our Association, which represents approximately 65 Library Boards and 650 library trustees around the province, is very grateful for the increased funding and support that the Provincial Government has provided for public libraries as part of the Strategic Plan - Libraries Without Walls. We are especially appreciative of the on-going funding that allows trustees from all over the province to be able to provide input into the implementation strategies. We also would like to thank the Minister again for her support at the Library Reception at UBCM.

Key Issues:

Need to increase provincial operating grants

Even with the current influx of financial support around the strategic plan, there continues to be a need to increase the level of BC's per capita operating grants to public libraries. BC's rate is among the lowest in Canada. Since 1991 there has been only one across-the-board increase to the per capita rate - a \$0.10 increase in 2004/2005. What this means to a local library is that while they are working on the new provincial initiatives such as One Card and 24-hour virtual reference, they are still facing day-to-day challenges such as funding adequate hours of operation and staffing. For example, the library in Midway is only open 22 hours per week - and two of these hours are staffed by volunteers. In Hudson's Hope, the library is only open 24 hours per week - including only four hours/day on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday. In many of these communities, the local public library serves as an important community hub and provides valuable access to critical tools such as the internet and employment related resources. An increase in the provincial operating grant budget of \$3 million, with continued per capita weighting favouring smaller communities, would allow local libraries to expand their hours of service to their local communities.

Role of public libraries in the expanded mandate of the Ministry of Education

Libraries are well positioned to assist the entire population range in the area of literacy. We would like to know more about Minister's plans for the expanded mandate of this Ministry and the implications for public libraries and library boards. For example - will public libraries continue to be governed by local autonomous boards?

We are also very interested in being involved in the review of The Library Act that is scheduled to begin in 2006.

Provincial support for national programs

With funding for two important national programs in question - the Community Access Program (CAP) and Canada Post's Library Book Rate - we would appreciate any assistance and support from the province with the federal government in this regard. These programs directly affect the ability of local public libraries to deliver services. BCLTA also will continue to work with the Canadian Library Association/Canadian Library Trustees Association on behalf of BC trustees to reach national goals.