

**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
October 27, 2006**



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

Speech from The Throne, September 12, 2005

Our Association, representing 68 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 of the plan as they did recently for the “Libraries in Dialogue with Government” Symposium in Victoria.

BCLTA also appreciates the numerous other ways that your Ministry supports our efforts – e.g. targeted grants that have allowed us to offer free training for trustees throughout the province this year, a grant to support an Executive Director who can implement the goals of the Board, and an annual operating grant that supports our newsletter, website and Board meetings. We also would like to thank the Minister for her annual support at the Library Reception at UBCM and at our conference each spring.

Key Issues:

Making the 2006 OneCard and “every school-age student a card” grants permanent will enable libraries to continue participating in these important initiatives on an on-going basis.

The library community is very grateful for the grants from the Ministry in March of this year to support the OneCard program and to ensure that every school-age student has a library card. As you know, these two programs are being implemented around the province right now and will make it easier for all BC residents to take advantage of the outstanding resources available at public libraries. A continuation of the special funding that supports these programs needs to become part of the regular operating grants for libraries to be able to cover the costs of these programs on an on-going basis. Therefore, we request that public libraries continue to receive the same funding as they did in 2006 as a permanent lift to their operating grants.

Increasing provincial operating grants will relieve pressure on library budgets, increase access and allow for more program delivery that supports literacy development.

Even with the current influx of financial support around strategic plan initiatives such as OneCard, there continues to be a need to increase the base 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 OneCard or Askaway, they are still facing day-to-day challenges such as funding adequate hours of operation and staffing. These challenges are especially pronounced in smaller libraries where the local public library 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 meet basic levels of service and access around the province. Some specific examples are provided in the appendix to this document.

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

Participation in the review of the Library Act

Our organization and our members are very interested in being involved in the review of the Library Act that will begin in 2007.

Provincial support for national programs

With funding for two important national programs in constant flux – 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.

Thank you again for backing your government's commitment to make BC the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent with funding for a key component of this goal – public libraries.

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

Appendix

Smithers Public Library

An increase in the provincial operating grant would allow this library to:

- Expand their opening hours. Even with every school-aged student receiving a library card, access for children is currently limited because the library is only open after 5 pm on two days during the week.
- Enhance their programming to youth. This library serves an area which has 33% of the population under 19 years of age. Current funding only allows programming for children under five years old. For other children, programming has been sporadic because it has been funded mainly by grants. An increase in the base operating grant would allow regular programming on a sustained basis which would support the province's literacy initiative.
- Increase their staff. The Smithers Public Library has seen phenomenal growth recently with circulation up 45% since 2003 but only a modest 10% increase in staffing hours two years ago and a heavy reliance on volunteers.
- Maintain their public internet terminals. This library does not receive any assistance through CAP. SPL currently provides computer and internet access to support over 6,000 internet sessions each year, with most of these sessions for community members who rely on this service as they do not have computers or internet at home.

Salmo Public Library

An increase in the provincial operating grant would allow this rural library serving 2,800 people to:

- Increase their hours. The Salmo Public Library is very well used by the community however it is only open 22 hours per week – they are closed on Thursday and Sunday, and only open for two hours each on Monday and Wednesday. Expanded hours of service is one of most common requests from residents.
- Increase their staff. Currently this library is operated by one Chief Librarian and a Children's Librarian (12 hours/week). With the province's emphasis on literacy, there is very little time for programming beyond the basics of story-time and school visits. Staff are also finding that with expanded resources available online (e.g. Askaway, databases, etc.) the public needs increased support on the computers. Additional resources would allow for individual patron assistance or for the library to conduct some general training sessions. Finally, it should be noted that because of tight budgets some of the library's basic operating functions such as the circulation desk are run by volunteers, which can present some operational challenges. For example, it cannot be expected that volunteers will be aware of all the resources the library has to offer or aware of all the online free services that are available – therefore, the volunteers cannot promote them and patrons are not able to take advantage of these services. Increased staffing levels would help to meet these challenges.
- Increase their public internet stations. The library currently has two stations and it is not uncommon for there to be a line-up of people waiting for access when the library opens. The library has the only public/free internet access in the village and outlying area. The next nearest community is a half hour drive away and there is no public transportation to these other centers. Because Salmo has no provincial or federal agencies, internet access is extremely important to the community because residents rely on these internet stations to access and register for services such as Income Assistance, Employment Insurance, WorkSafe, legal aid, etc.

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Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL)

An increase in the provincial operating grant would allow this large regional library to:

- Continue to offer literacy outreach programs to at-risk preschool children in specifically targeted neighbourhoods. A new program is currently underway in the south Nanaimo area and is supported by Public Library Services' Equity Grants. However to continue and enhance this initiative VIRL requires sustained funding to make the staff position permanent, to develop additional "preschool literacy kits" and to create other opportunities to reach out to families with children at risk of not ever learning to read.
- Provide better service to teens that have dropped out of school and street kids that will not be reached by the "every school-age student a card" program. As well, they would like to expand their literacy programs for adults that have not yet learned to read.
- Increase operating hours in smaller communities. In large VIRL communities, branches are open 7 days a week – approximately 60 open hours per week. In small communities, the library is locked most of the time because VIRL does not have enough money to pay for staff to keep them open. Here are some examples of VIRL's open hours in 22 small rural communities:

Branches	Weekly open hours
Port Clements, Sandspit, Woss, Port Renfrew	7 or 8 hours
Cortes, Masset, Port Alice, Sayward, Tahsis, Union Bay	10 to 14 hours
Bella Coola, Sointula, Tofino, Ucluelet	15 to 19 hours
Cumberland, Gold River, Port McNeill, Queen Charlotte	20 to 23 hours.
Chemainus, Gabriola, Hornby, Port Hardy	26 to 37 hours



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