

# ONTARIO'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES ARE ESSENTIAL TO PEOPLE AND FAMILIES ACROSS ONTARIO

## 2019 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

Public libraries are Ontario's farthest-reaching, most cost-effective public resource, reaching 98% of Ontarians in hundreds of communities of all sizes. Public libraries are local, close to home, and adapt to meet the people-focused needs of their communities. Through strong local partnerships, trained frontline library staff develop & provide programs and services that millions of people depend on. These include job training, small business support and affordable & high-quality children's and senior's programs. They also provide reliable broadband access and are the frontline ServiceOntario point-of-access for thousands of Ontario government transactions and services.

Public libraries deliver a big return on investment – more than \$5 in direct, local economic benefits for every \$1 invested. They're experts at maximizing the value of every dollar and focused on providing frontline support and people-focused resources. But many public library budgets are stretched to the limit, even as more people depend on local public libraries than ever before. This is especially true in small town, rural and Northern communities, where the public library is the main – or only – community hub. Many communities face growing fiscal pressures from local economic changes, aging populations, and rising costs for maintaining infrastructure.

Provincial funding for public libraries has fallen far below what is needed to maintain a strong, local public library system across Ontario. Lack of action by the previous government is threatening the long-term sustainability of many local public libraries, particularly in rural and Northern Ontario.

We understand Ontario's fiscal challenge. However, unlike most other sectors, provincial base funding for public libraries has been frozen for over 20 years. With no increase to the annual provincial share of public library base funding, the net present value of the province's investment has decreased by over 60%. Under the previous government, a patchwork of one-time grants focused on funding the province's priorities – not those of local libraries and the communities they serve.

That's why the Ontario Library Association and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries recommend an additional investment of \$17 million annually in provincial base funding. Shared across hundreds of

public libraries, with an updated formula that puts an emphasis on libraries in smaller towns and rural communities, this investment will bring stability to a modern, locally-focused public library sector in Ontario. Predictable and flexible funding will enable local public libraries to make smart, long-term, people-focused investments to meet the needs of their communities.

Strong public libraries are essential to millions of people in Ontario; they're not a nice to have. Hard-working Ontarians, families with young children, and seniors in every community across the province depend on them. Protecting public libraries will make sure that people will continue to have access to the critical resources and services they provide – no matter where they live in Ontario.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Minister of Finance's pre-budget consultation and look forward to building upon our long-standing partnership with the Ontario Government.

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