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**AGENDA ITEM DOC6**

**Subject: Regional Government Review Submission**

**Date: May 25, 2019**

**Prepared by: Stephen Abram, FOPL Executive Director**

**Prepared for: FOPL Board Meeting, June 7, 2019**

**This was submitted to the Regional Government Review by the deadline. A longer version was presented orally to the co-chairs.**

**Niagara Region Libraries also presented and submitted.**

**The ultimate report will be a secret cabinet document.**

Stephen Abram

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RE: **Regional Government Review Consultations**

TO: Chairs Ken Seiling and Michael Fenn

Via email at [regionalgovreview@ontario.ca](mailto:regionalgovreview@ontario.ca)

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in your Regional Government Review consultations.

We are the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries. We represent Ontario’s over 310 library systems with over 6 million library cardholders – in Ontario’s rural, northern, town, county, suburban, urban, indigenous, and francophone communities including all 82 Southern Ontario communities covered by this consultation.

Public libraries are Ontario’s farthest-reaching, most cost-effective public resource, reaching 98% of Ontarians. Public libraries are local 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. They also provide reliable broadband access and are the frontline ServiceOntario point-of-access for thousands of Ontarians. Local public libraries are one of the most impactful and beloved community resources in Ontario. Despite a 22-year provincial funding freeze and virtually no growth per capita public libraries have adapted exceptionally well to the changes in Ontario’s communities.

Dozens of independent, local community library studies show that for every dollar of municipal and provincial investment, the community enjoys, on average, over $5 in raw economic return. Indeed, our ***total*** economic and social return on investment (in 8 new 2018/9 studies) showed an enviable return of **2,700 per cent!** Public libraries are already incredibly efficient local services.

Ontario’s Public Library systems are exemplars of good local, community-led, governance, advanced, large-scale consortial and collaborative activities and strong partnerships with local, regional, municipal, provincial, and federal organizations for the benefit of the communities they serve. We have too much data and proofs to share here, but we stand ready to provide any at your request. Our locally led model should be reviewed for other sectors.

Ontario’s local public library boards are **voluntary & community-led**.  **All of Ontario’s local library board trustees are unpaid**, and take on these important roles to ensure that the public library is able to sustainably deliver critical resources and services to the people of their communities.

Local public library boards are **independent from local municipal government**, while at the same time are **focused on responding to the needs and character of their communities**.

This local & independent tradition, which has existed for over a century and is set out in the *Public Libraries Act*, and is what **sets public library boards apart from other ‘advisory’ municipal boards** established under the *Municipal Act* and is key to our success.

**We ask that these frameworks be maintained so that “The People” continue to have their voice in the running of their favourite local institution**– even if this creates an asymmetrical system.

We also welcome the opportunity to work together with Ontario to address outdated red tape that will help our local public library boards deliver essential resources and services even more cost-effectively. Our cooperative agencies SOLS and OLS-North ensure very high cost-effectiveness and efficiencies in local library operations by providing frameworks for collaboration at the provincial level. **Despite recent agency funding cuts, care should be taken to look for provincial synergies rather than regional government controls that could damage the effectiveness delivered through decades of cooperation.**

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Minister of Municipal Affairs Regional Government Consultations and look forward to building upon our long-standing partnership with the Ontario Government.