



Oct. 6, 2016

Honourable Eleanor McMahon

Minister

Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport/Minister Responsible the Ontario Trillium Foundation
9th Floor, Hearst Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2E1

Dear Minister McMahon:

The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries has been asked by CELA (Centre for Equitable Library Access) to write a letter of support for their continued funding in providing services to Ontarians with print disabilities through Ontario’s public libraries. Over the last three years, this government has supported CELA’s mandate but funding for this key endeavour expires on March 31, 2017.

I am the executive director of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries. FOPL represents Ontario’s over 300 public library systems exceeding 1,000 branches in virtually every Ontario community including First Nations reserves. Over 5 million Ontario residents make hundreds of millions of visits to the library, in person and virtually, *every* year. Libraries are trusted, accessible community hubs providing freely accessible professional service, technology, programs, and resources to a more diverse range of residents than any other cultural institution. Ontarians have voted with their library cards and passionate support for public libraries continues to grow in the digital age.

**People with print disabilities deserve the same reading opportunities as other Ontarians.** CELA provides these by making more than 400,000 accessible ebooks in English and French available in the format of the reader’s choice through local public libraries. They are committed to the independence and integration of persons with disabilities and all who live, learn, play, and invest in their communities: they are the “community hub” for ALL residents. In Ontario, 310 public libraries participate in CELA as member libraries, including 45 First Nation public libraries. Last fiscal year, close to 1 million items were circulated to approximately 14,000 Ontario CELA users with print disabilities awhile 239 member libraries offer deposit collections totaling 108,488 titles.

By centralizing acquisitions, support and training, and partnering with major producers of accessible materials, CELA makes it possible to deliver content in a cost effective manner in communities across Ontario through libraries. This model fulfills provincial AODA requirements and ensures equity of access to all Ontarians who have a print disability.

**Sustained provincial funding for CELA must continue** and it must do so separate from that provided to the library sector. If this funding is not continued the model for equitable access for all Ontarians to print materials is disrupted and the onus is placed on local communities to choose to pr0ovide this service in an environment of already challenged municipal budgets. Individual libraries cannot deliver this kind of service without this additional support as their local budgets are limited and provincial grants (e.g. electronic resources and connectivity) have already been curtailed. Any reduction or change in this funding will have the consequence of reducing services to the print disabled (reading disabilities go far beyond the visually impaired) and have an impact on rural, remote, northern, and small town communities to a greater extent. Ontario residents with print disabilities are everywhere.

Simply put: Ontario’s Public Libraries are a great public investment to ensure equity of access for all with talented, professional staff, technological and information resources, and service. Now more than ever before, they play a critical role in the social, educational, cultural and economic success of the communities in our province. Public Libraries are an essential investment in the future of our communities and are essential drivers of success in school preparedness, reading readiness, economic and employment success, and social equity. As the development of the knowledge economy progresses, public libraries are a vital link for every resident and every community to ensure success of all Ontarians, regardless of location or background. We reduce service duplication and provide a venue for the delivery of government initiatives in every community.

I hope that you will consider continued funding for this important undertaking.

Sincerely,

Stephen Abram, MLS

Executive Director

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Cc: Shelagh Paterson, Executive Director, Ontario Library Association

 Kevin Finnerty, ADM, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport



**CELA Briefing Document for Minister McMahon:**

* It is estimated that more than 3 million Canadians have print disabilities:
	+ 33% experience varying degrees of vision loss
	+ 27% have learning disabilities (e.g. dyslexia, brain injuries)
	+ 40% have challenges with dexterity - the ability to actually handle a book (e.g. arthritis, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s)
* Over 90% of content published today is not available in accessible formats
* While some material available through public libraries - including digital audio books and eBooks available from library vendors such as Overdrive, Inc. - may meet the needs of a portion of Canadians with print disabilities, the titles available are minimal, most often not truly accessible, and are not good substitutes for what many people with print disabilities require.
* Shortfalls in delivering true accessibility leaves a significant gap that results in greater risk for cultural, educational, economic, and social exclusion for Canadians with print disabilities
* As outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Canada has agreed to uphold, people with print disabilities deserve the same reading opportunities as other Canadians.
* By providing greater access to reading materials in accessible formats through public libraries, the prospects for improving the literacy and education of Canadians with print disabilities is enhanced, opening up new and wider opportunities for employment and engagement in their community
* The Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) addresses those challenges by enabling public libraries to offer more than 400,000 accessible books in the format of the patron’s choice.
* CELA, launched on April 1, 2014, has solidified its place as a sustainable and necessary public service component of its member libraries. Whether patrons sign up for CELA service or determine that the services at their local public library will suffice, the needs of Ontarians with print disabilities are being addressed by their local public libraries like never before and in Ontario, CELA has been the catalyst.
* CELA also provides educators the ability to borrow materials on behalf of their students with print disabilities.
* The light being cast nationally on the needs of Canadians with disabilities as a result of the ratification of the Marrakesh Treaty, the momentum building for a possible Canadians with Disability Act and, specifically in Ontario, the ongoing implementation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), speaks to a recognition of the importance of the services that CELA provides.
* By centralizing acquisitions, partnering with the largest producer of accessible material in Canada (CNIB) and one of the largest in the United States (Bookshare), and leveraging the distribution privileges in section 32(1) of the Copyright Act it has been proven possible to offer Canadians with print disabilities local access to an equitable library service, which no public library could offer within their staffing and budgetary capacity.
* CELA’s cost is attributed primarily to acquiring and curating these materials, facilitating and coordinating production and delivery and supporting patron and member libraries at a national level. CELA continually works with CNIB, Bookshare and other vendors and partners to reduce costs.