

## FOPL – 2019 Ontario Pre-Budget Consultations

### Deputation Remarks –Jan. 18, 2019

- Good afternoon. Greetings Honourable Minister Fedeli, and MPP Parm Gill.
- Thank you for the opportunity today to participate in your 2019 Pre-Budget consultations.
- My name is Stephen Abram and I am a professional librarian and the executive director of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries / La Fédération des bibliothèques publiques de l'Ontario. 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 your good friends at the North Bay Public Library. In Impacting 74% of Ontario's residents who visit our libraries six times every second 24/7/365 and growing fast!
- Minister Fedeli, we hear very good things from our members at North Bay Public Library, about you and your term as Mayor of North Bay and we know you made great progress on the role of public libraries in the North including the library-led Blue Sky Network.

The Federation is here today to highlight how public libraries can help Ontarians and your government's agenda. We are especially supportive of digital investments (including your government's promise of an additional \$100 million in broadband connectivity, fair digital resourcing of small town, rural, and northern communities, as well as your focus on re-imagining and supporting economic development, employment, and education.

- Local Public libraries are Ontario's farthest-reaching, most cost-effective public resource as excellent stewards of public funding. Public librarians seem to be able to rub two nickels together and get a quarter's worth of local impact.
- We're growing our impact with growth of our programs of 83% as one of the top, most used, most valued, public institutions in Ontario. We want to emphasize that Ontario's public library systems are running on all cylinders despite a 22-year funding freeze during times of enormous transformation. We want the government to be aware that we deliver an incomparable and cost-effective, return on investment. In short, dozens of independent, local community studies who 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 published under Ontario government special funding) showed an enviable return of **2,700 per cent!** We help millions of regular people in virtually every community across Ontario – large and small – reach their potential.

- We're Ontario's original community hubs, with a proven history of responding to and reflecting local priorities. We welcome being consulted on your regional government review,
- This includes providing access to job training and re-training programs, small business supports, reliable broadband internet, high-quality children's programs for young families, ER diversion, – as well as supporting self-directed lifelong learning.
- Our contribution to the digital capacity of Ontario's small, rural, remote and northern communities is especially important. Coming from Nipissing, I am sure you're very aware of how local people and communities. East Ferris, your home town, have been vocal about the need for increased access to broadband, and the role that the public library plays in making sure that people in smaller communities have access to the same digital resources as those in Toronto. A new resident of North Bay and local library cardholder was shocked to discover that they had lost their access to Lynda.com which they had enjoyed in Windsor. Your government could – quickly – implement a province-wide and increase the digital learning capacity for all – through the public library network infrastructure.
- Our libraries drive and sustain economic development, especially for the people in smaller towns, northern, indigenous, and rural communities.
- We're also a lifeline for seniors, keeping them involved and active in their communities as they move through life.
- And in many communities, we're the frontline access point for digital Ontario government services and transactions through a formal partnership with ServiceOntario
- That is to say, public libraries deliver a big return on investment despite just \$2 per resident in annual funding.

- While we're experts at maximizing the value of every dollar, we've reached a critical crossroads.
- Unlike other transfer payment recipients, provincial base funding for public libraries has been frozen for over 22 years, and many libraries are struggling to keep up even as demand continues to rise.
- While we recognize and understand the province's fiscal challenge there is an immediate need to bring stability to many of our public libraries across Ontario.
- Through a small investment in the province's annual base funding – \$17 million – shared across hundreds of libraries, Ontario will ensure the long-term sustainability of public libraries, especially in smaller towns and rural communities.
- That's less than a 2.3% increase for each of the 22 years that provincial base funding has been frozen – without accounting for the impact of inflation.
- This enhanced, predictable and flexible funding will allow Ontario's public libraries to continue to make immediate and long-term plans that best respond to local needs, including working with the province to provide better and faster access to government services.
- Together, we can help make sure that all the people – no matter where they live in Ontario – will have access to their local public library and the critical resources and services it provides.
- Thank you.