



**Federation of Ontario Public Libraries
Deputation to the Standing Committee on General Government
Bill 132 – Better for People, Smarter for Business Act, 2019
Peterborough, Ontario Nov. 22, 2019**

- Good morning
- My name is Stephen Abram, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the members of the committee today in my role as Executive Director of the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, or FOPL.
- FOPL represents 246 public library systems in Ontario, including 47 First Nations public libraries, in communities throughout the Province.
- Our public libraries are Ontario's farthest-reaching, most cost-effective public resource and community hubs, and together helping millions of Ontarians independently train, learn and reach their potential – wherever they live in the province.
- Working alongside our partners in the Ontario Library Association, we're committed to ensuring that Ontario's public libraries are always modernizing and contributing to the social, education, cultural and economic success of our communities.
- I am here today to provide our input on two proposed changes to the Public Libraries Act included in Bill 132, which will impact the governance and operations of local Public Library Boards throughout Ontario.
- Legislatively-mandated Public Library Boards are the independent, community-led, and locally-constituted governance bodies that oversee every one of Ontario's public libraries.
- Comprised of both public members and municipal representatives, they are essential to ensuring that public libraries are community-led, responsive to evolving local needs, and are effectively governed.

- I would like to start by sharing our strongest endorsement of the first of these changes, which, if passed, will give permanent residents the same opportunity as Canadian citizens to serve as Public Library Board members.
- Providing Public Library Boards with a larger and more diverse pool of prospective board members will help them welcome new voices, increase diversity & inclusion in community leadership, and better respond to the evolving needs of the people they serve.
- However, my priority today is to discuss with you our concern with the second of the proposed changes, and provide a proposed alternative that better reflects the needs of Public Library Boards.
- Bill 132 proposes to reduce the minimum number of meetings a public library board is required to hold each year to 4, from the currently legislated minimum of 10.
- While many in our sector believe that reducing the mandatory minimum number of meetings from the current level is reasonable,
- There is overwhelming concern that a minimum of 4 meetings is too few and will create significant impediments to effective public library governance.
- Public Library Board members are unpaid and serve in a volunteer capacity. This, combined with the competing time pressures faced by municipal councillors serving on Library Boards, informs the ability of many boards to operate effectively and in a timely manner.
- Overwhelming agendas will make meetings too long for many members to be able to participate, and at the same time, meetings will take place too infrequently for Library Boards to keep up with important and time-sensitive operational decisions.
- We recognize that what is proposed is a minimum, and that Public Library Boards may meet more frequently than this on a regular basis, as well as convene special and emergency meetings. We are confident that some will continue to do so.
- However, it is vital for the sustainability of all local public libraries that the minimum number of meetings is set at a level that ensures that every Public Library Board conducts its business in a timely way that reinforces competent and accountable governance.
- In recognition of the government's intent to reduce the number of mandatory meetings and inform our feedback to this committee, FOPL worked with the Ontario Library

Boards Association to survey our members and gather their perspective on what an appropriate new minimum of mandatory meetings should be.

- We had over 350 respondents, representing the full spectrum of Ontario's public libraries and boards, both in size and geography.
- Some respondents were concerned that any reduction in the number of minimum meetings would create challenges for their board.
- Many respondents indicated that a reduction in the mandatory minimum was doable, with a minimum of 7 or 8 meetings being by far the most preferred option.
- I am enclosing a copy of our survey results with my remarks, for your review.
- Therefore, based on the advice of our members, we strongly recommend that the proposed change to subsection 16(1) of the Public Libraries Act in Bill 132 be amended to set **a new minimum of either 7 or 8 meetings annually**.
- We believe that this strikes the right balance between the provincial government's intent to provide boards with greater flexibility, and what is required to ensure that robust governance is maintained across all Public Library Boards in Ontario.
- I am happy to answer any questions you may have.
- Thank you.

Stephen Abram, MLS, FSLA
Executive Director
Federation of Ontario Public Libraries
789 Yonge Street
Toronto, ON
Canada M4W 2G8

sabram@fopl.ca

FOPL: 416-395-0746

Blog: <http://www.fopl.ca>

Twitter: @foplnews

stephen.abram@gmail.com

Cel: 416-669-4855

Blog: <http://www.StephensLighthouse.com>

Twitter: @sabram