

CUPE LOCAL 2329
Pre-Budget Consultation
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Introduction

On behalf of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 2329, we are pleased to present this Brief to the Minister of Finance as part of the 2015 Pre-Budget Consultation process. CUPE Local 2329 represents more than three hundred (300) members at the Provincial Information and Library Resources Board (PILRB). We have members in all ninety-five (95) public libraries in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

CUPE Local 2329 members provide the public library services that help to make Newfoundland and Labrador a great place to live. Our members do this work every day, and it equips us to make a positive and informed contribution to the budgeting process with respect to the provision of library services and the funding of the PILRB.

Value of Public Library Systems

The Martin Prosperity Institute of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto conducted the first economic valuation study in the Canadian library sector.¹ This study was released in December 2013.

The economic impact study of the Toronto Public Library found:

- For every dollar invested in the Toronto Public Library, Torontonians received \$5.63 of value.
- On average, one open hour at any one of the library's 98 branches generates \$2,515 in benefits for the city of Toronto. The average cost of one open hour is \$653, so the average benefit is almost 4 times the average cost.
- For those who use the library, the value of their library membership is as much as \$500.

The services delivered by the public library were found to enhance the city's competitiveness and prosperity as well as contributing to a better quality of life for all.

Libraries are essential to communities, especially rural communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. They provide access to a range of services that improve the lives of their patrons. Patrons can use high speed internet and other technology, including digital cameras, not to mention the library collection and inter-library loans. Libraries also foster a sense of community while at the same time aiding with increasing literacy levels for the members of the community.

Funding and Prior Budget Cuts

The PILRB is funded primarily through an operating grant from the Provincial Government. Library funding has been on a downward spiral for the last few years. The operating grant in 2011-12 was \$11.2 million; in 2012-13 it was \$11,061,800, a decrease of \$104,100 from the previous year; in 2013-14 it was 10,051,200, a decrease of \$1,010,600. Additionally, the cancellation of the Community Access Program in 2012-13 resulted in approximately \$500,000 annually being removed from the overall budget of the PILRB. The Community Access Program was responsible for almost the entire public access computer system in libraries throughout the province. The \$500,000 annually was used to help maintain the system. This was a loss which was felt very deeply. Especially given the extent of the cuts which came the following year, 2013-14.

The \$1.2 million cut to our public libraries in the 2013-14 budget has meant reduced hours and services. This decrease resulted in devastating losses to the provincial public library system. 17.5 positions were lost, as well as \$120,000 in capital funding and \$200,000 (20%) of the materials budget. It seems self evident that a library with few materials is a library with few patrons. The cuts to the materials budget have resulted in a vicious circle of dwindling statistics. Fewer materials mean fewer check outs. In small, rural communities it may not take an avid reader long to completely run through the entire new book list; especially if that person has a particular interest in one genre, for instance crime fiction.

Added to this is the reduction in the substitute coverage budget of \$150,000 in the 2012-13 budget. Substitute librarians fill in for regular staff when the regular staff are unavailable. The PILRB dealt with this decrease by implementing a policy of 50% coverage which leads to library closures when the substitute works in a one person library. It is simple to see the negative effect of this policy on the library patron. If a regular staff member seeks and is approved for 2 weeks of annual leave, during that 2 weeks a substitute will fill in for 50% of the regular opening hours of the library only. It is more than possible that patrons may attempt to access the library during regular opening hours, only to find that the hours have been reduced. In the case of scheduled leave, this possibility may be reduced by notifying the public of the opening hours reduction but in the case of unscheduled leave this is not possible. How many times will a patron attempt to access the library and find it closed unexpectedly before that patron decides not to return? Of note is the fact that seventy seven (77) of the ninety five (95) libraries are operated with one staff person.

Another devastating result of all of these cuts is the loss of technical support. Prior to the 2013-14 budget there were eight (8) technical support positions serving the entire PILRB. Eight people dealing with the technical support needs of ninety-six locations, including divisional offices and the administrative office in Stephenville, was tricky. Now there are only 5 people doing this work. It is difficult for them to keep up with the demand.

One final grave impact of the above mentioned budget cuts was the closure of the library in St. Lunaire-Griquet. The Library closed on December 31, 2013 when the school in which it was located closed. This was to be a temporary measure until an alternate space could be found. However, given the dire funding circumstances of the PILRB, the only option was to locate a space which did not increase the costs to the PILRB. A search for such a space yielded no results and the library was officially closed on January 8, 2015.

Conclusion

CUPE Local 2329 urges your government to properly fund the Provincial Information and Library Resources Board. This is a position which is supported by the majority of people in this province. In polling conducted by Vector Research for CUPE Newfoundland Labrador in June 2013, seven in ten people said they opposed reducing library staff and hours. We believe very strongly in the benefits the PILRB provide for the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. These benefits have been shown time and again. It is more than unfortunate that one of our ninety-six (96) locations has already closed; please do everything in your power to ensure that the former library in St. Lunaire-Griquet is the last the Province will lose. Please also ensure that when a mother and her child turns up on the steps of one of the seventy seven (77) single staff person libraries, she will find the doors open, and staff person inside ready to assist her to find whatever information she requires; perhaps information that will cultivate a thirst for knowledge in her and her child for years to come.

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ⁱ Martin Prosperity Institute, *So Much More: The Economic Impact of the Toronto Public Library on the City of Toronto*, December 2013.