

Annapolis Valley Regional Library

P.O. Box 510 236 Commercial Street Berwick, NS B0P 1E0

Phone 1-866-922-0229

www.valleylibrary.ca email: administration@valleylibrary.ca

The Honourable Allan MacMaster
Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage
1741 Brunswick St., 3rd Floor
P.O. Box 456, STN Central
Halifax, NS B3J 2R5
Sent via email: MIN_CCTH@novascotia.ca

December 5, 2023

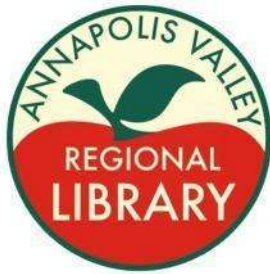
Dear Minister MacMaster,

We are writing to highlight the urgency of starting the funding review process as soon as possible and request the Ministry's support in ensuring continuation of the service that means so much to Nova Scotians.

AVRL is the busiest rural regional library system in Nova Scotia, serving 20% of the non-HRM population with 11 branches. And AVRL consistently demonstrates leadership in delivering sophisticated and modern library services. People are confident in coming back to public libraries and the feelings of community they find there, and it is our mission to continue to find ways to inspire and improve their quality of life with reliable service and informed resources. In 2022-23, circulation of materials and program attendance rebounded above 2019 levels, and we signed up a record-setting 5,252 new cardholders. 2023-24 is already even busier, with usage across all major indicators at 10+% increase over 2022-23.

Despite these successes, the limitations of previous funding formulas have created in very real negative outcomes resulting in staff reductions, including historically the lowest salaries for library workers in the Province. As of 2023, we are no longer able to recruit and retain staff to perform the core functions of the library. As a result, AVRL has already been forced to reduce programming and open hours to the public. Furthermore, the staff have recently unionized as NSUPE Local 23 and ratified their first collective agreement, during which they negotiated for modest wage increases of \$1 per hour, which brings the starting wage at AVRL to \$15.81.

For the 2020-2025 funding cycle, the Provincial contribution is \$1,919,600. Since 2011, AVRL's total funding from all sources has only increased by \$254,000 or 10.37%. As of the date of this letter, the Bank of Canada estimates that inflation from 2011-2023 has been in excess of 31%. Current funding has been declining in purchasing power for decades, and AVRL is now in a precarious financial situation, with operating costs outstripping the current financial envelope.



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To fund operational increases, AVRL has been gapping open positions and reallocating funds, but in order to maintain current levels of service through 2023 and 2024, it will need to draw on its reserve funds. AVRL estimates that approximately 60% of the reserve will be depleted as of March 31, 2025 and we will not be able to sustain current levels of service in 2025-26. Operational expenses are so lean that mitigating the shortfall would be the equivalent of closing 5 of the 11 library branches.

In order to communicate any changes to the municipalities with enough time to implement any changes for April 1, 2025, an agreement would need to be reached and communicated to the municipalities by March 31st, 2024. This represents a very short timeline and increases the urgency of beginning the process.

The funding Municipalities in the Annapolis Region continue to believe in the value of public libraries and to make investments in their facilities, with the Town of Wolfville committing in 2023 to construct a new building in the downtown core, with a projected construction date of 2027. Indeed, all of the funding Municipalities have demonstrated how much they value their library service, replacing or renovating all 11 branches within the last 25 years.

Further, Nova Scotia's public libraries continue to work cooperatively, delivering a higher level of service while being increasingly efficient with our funding; in April 2022 the Same Page initiative was launched between the 8 rural regions, increasing the size of the shared collection to over 1 million items. For reference, AVRL only owns about 130,000 physical items. This has increased the depth and breadth of the collection enormously, and AVRL patrons immediately became the heaviest users in the Province.

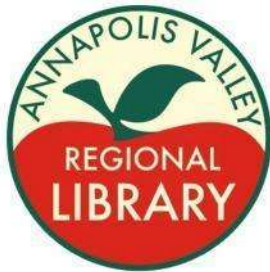
Libraries also continue to be places that can help to fulfill Provincial initiatives to improve quality of life in our communities. With 80 library locations across Nova Scotia, and locations open 7 days a week and staff who are trained in information literacy, libraries are an essential component in creating equitable, healthy communities. In 2023, this includes: continuing to distribute Rapid Antigen Test kits and menstrual supplies to mitigate the impacts of Period Poverty; promoting new initiatives related to health, education, tourism and culture; and allocating resources to increase education in treaty history and Mi'kmaw culture.

Public libraries are essential community hubs that bring people together and achieve enormous social and economic benefit. We respectfully ask for your help in bringing forward the value of public libraries in Nova Scotia and the case for enhanced financial investment to ensure that our communities thrive.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janet Ness".

Janet Ness, Board Chair



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CC: Mr. Keith Irving, MLA for Kings South

Mr. Carmen Kerr, MLA for Annapolis

Mr. John Lohr, MLA for Kings North

Mr. Chris Palmer, MLA for Kings West

Ms. Melissa Sheehy-Richard, MLA for Hants West

Stephanie Smith, Executive Director, Archives, Libraries and Museums, Dept of
Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage

Lynn Somers, Director, Nova Scotia Provincial Library, Dept of Communities,
Culture, Tourism and Heritage