

CORL – Council of Regional Librarians

June 3, 2026

Honourable Dave Ritcey
Minister of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage
1741 Brunswick Street, 3rd Floor
PO Box 456, Station Central, Halifax, NS B3J 2R5

Dear Minister Ritcey,

I am writing to urge the Government of Nova Scotia to take immediate action to address the growing funding crisis facing public libraries across our province.

Nova Scotia's regional libraries are currently facing an estimated funding gap of \$12.78 million. This estimate is based on research completed as part of the department led 2024 Library Funding Review and reflects the impact of inflation over the past two years. Core provincial funding has remained unchanged since 2020, despite years of inflation and steadily rising operational costs. While temporary bridge funding has helped delay the most serious impacts, it has not resolved the underlying issue.

Library regions have worked diligently to manage these pressures responsibly. They have expanded fundraising efforts, coordinated services, shared resources across regions, reduced staffing and service hours, cut programs and collections, postponed maintenance and capital investments, and eliminated expenses wherever possible. These measures have been taken even as libraries across Nova Scotia continue to experience year-over-year growth in visits, circulation, and program attendance.

The strain on library systems is now becoming unsustainable. Reduced staffing levels are contributing to safety concerns, staff burnout, and a diminished capacity to respond to growing community needs. Stagnant wages and limited operational support are also contributing to staff turnover, further reducing the ability of libraries to develop and sustain valuable programs and services.

On June 1, 2026, the Annapolis Valley Regional Library announced that, effective July 20, 2026, it will close five of its eleven branches. Without meaningful provincial investment, other library regions may be forced to make similar decisions within the next one to three years. The consequences of these reductions will extend far beyond library walls and will be felt throughout communities across Nova Scotia.

In difficult times, Nova Scotians rely on public libraries more, not less. Libraries meet people where they are and provide essential services to residents who are often underserved elsewhere. Public libraries provide:

- Seniors with opportunities for social connection and support to remain active and independent within their communities.

- Low-income Nova Scotians with access to computers, internet, printers, and assistance completing taxes, government forms, job applications, and other essential tasks.
- Children and teens with safe after-school spaces, literacy support, and educational programming.
- Newcomers with welcoming community spaces that support integration and belonging.
- Community groups and volunteers with accessible meeting spaces.
- Entrepreneurs and small business owners with places to work, meet, and access information and services.

Every service reduction or branch closure has a ripple effect throughout the community. When a library branch closes, communities often lose one of their last free and inclusive public gathering spaces. In many smaller communities, libraries are the heart of civic life. Their loss deepens social isolation, widens the digital divide, and weakens the social connections that contribute directly to community wellbeing and public safety.

The Mass Casualty Commission's report, *Turning the Tide Together*, emphasizes the importance of strong social infrastructure, trusted local relationships, and connected communities in supporting resilience and public safety. Public libraries are uniquely positioned to help provide exactly these conditions.

For a relatively modest investment, the Government of Nova Scotia can preserve and strengthen a province-wide network that delivers tremendous social and economic value. Public libraries support digital access to government services, workforce readiness, entrepreneurship, newcomer integration, health navigation, mental health, and healthy aging. They also serve as an efficient and trusted distribution network for public programs and services.

This is not simply an investment in libraries. It is an investment in stronger, safer, healthier, and more connected communities across Nova Scotia.

To ensure standards in service delivery across all regions and the long-term sustainability of library services, The Council of Regional Librarians requests an increase to the core provincial operating grant of \$12.78 million, with future funding levels subject to annual indexation to account for inflationary pressures and rising operating costs.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,



Erin Comeau, Chair
Council of Regional Librarians

CC: Premier Tim Houston
Christopher Shore, Deputy Minister, CCTH
Sara Halliday, Associate Deputy Minister, CCTH
Stephanie Smith, Executive Director, Libraries & Museums
Lynn Somers, Director, NSPL
Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities