

Hon. Dale Kirby,
Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development

RE: The closing of 54 Newfoundland and Labrador public libraries

The Faculty of Information and Media Studies at Western University would like to express its deep concern over the closing of more than half of the public libraries in Newfoundland and Labrador. We are concerned that these closures will cause significant hardship to residents. These closures, along with the implementation of a 10% book tax, will significantly impede the growth of literacy in the province.

The efforts put forward by the provincial government to ameliorate the extent of the impact of these cuts are well meaning, yet simplify the true extent of the problem. A focus on ebooks and making sure most of NL residents are within a half hour's drive to a library are superficial measures that will do little to alleviate access issues.

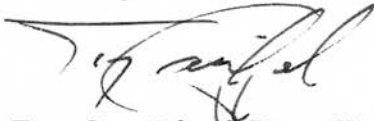
The proposed increase in e-book provision is laudable, but access issues by residents of NL will lessen the possible positive effects. A significant portion of residents within the province do not have access, or use, the internet. Even if internet use levels were universal, public libraries do far more than just provide access to books. They provide programming and classes on a variety of topics. They act as informal and formal education outlets, providing a place for students of all ages a space to study and learn. They provide a location in the community that is for the community rather than commercial interests. In addition, the public library staff at those branches provides a wealth of reference services as well as research and homework help to the communities they serve.

A half hour's drive by car for the licensed and able-bodied sounds reasonable, until one considers doing so during the winter. For those community members who are less mobile this is a significant impediment. Many seniors, persons with disabilities, young people, as well as impoverished community members who lack access to a car will essentially be cut off from the physical library with these closures.

May 18, 2016

We urge the government of Newfoundland and Labrador to rethink these cuts. While we understand the serious nature of the budgetary situation in Newfoundland and Labrador, these cuts will harm those residents who are most in need and curtail any potential increase in literacy rates across the province.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Carmichael', written over a horizontal line.

Tom Carmichael, Dean, Head of Faculty Council

The Faculty of Information and Media Studies
Western University