Peace Library System

August 24, 2019

Honourable Bernadette Jordan
Minister of Rural Economic Development
Wellington Building, Room 530
House of Commons
Ottawa   K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Jordan:

We would like to commend you on the *High-Speed Access for All: Canada's Connectivity Strategy* that was recently released. We know that this arose from extensive consultation across the country where you heard about the need for access to affordable high-speed Internet and mobile wireless coverage. This is certainly true of many parts of northwestern Alberta, which is the area served by Peace Library System.

In Alberta we are privileged to have the provincially-funded SuperNet backbone for high speed connectivity. Public libraries are connected to SuperNet and receive between 5 Mbps (smaller libraries) to 100 Mbps (larger libraries) in bandwidth. However, there are two challenges facing rural Alberta libraries. First, 5 Mbps is no longer adequate to serve library customers who want to conduct Internet searches, check email, stream or download resources, and take advantage of distance learning. Several of the smaller libraries in our region regularly use an average of 5+ Mbps per month. Monthly demand for High Prairie Municipal Library typically exceeds 10 Mbps per month. The library computers are used heavily by people from First Nation and Métis communities, and the lack of bandwidth is very frustrating.

It is our hope that the new Strategy you have launched will benefit libraries by "beefing up" their broadband. Libraries provide more and more digital services to a public that is used to high speed and instant connectivity. Even smaller libraries need a minimum of 20 Mbps. We recommend that you partner with the Public Library Services Branch, Alberta Municipal Affairs, and Service Alberta to enhance SuperNet services to libraries.
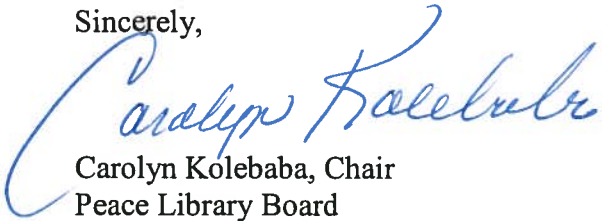
The second concern is last mile connectivity. While a library may be able to provide high-speed broadband access, many individuals in surrounding rural areas have limited connectivity. They are unable to take advantage of online library services such as downloading eBooks, reading eMagazines and eNewspapers, and accessing music and movies. Cellular service in some of these areas is also limited.

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We would like to see the Strategy and related funding benefit small communities and rural families in northwestern Alberta who experience dial-up connections. While the backbone is there, the last mile services need to be augmented.

Thank you for your sincere concern for rural economic development and rural connectivity. We would be pleased if libraries could help with your initiatives. Peace Library System serves 46 public libraries over a geographic area of 240,000 km². Collectively, Alberta's seven library systems serve over 270 public libraries, the majority of which are in rural areas of Alberta.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Kolebaba, Chair
Peace Library Board

Cc: Hon. Kaycee Madu, Minister of Municipal Affairs
        Diana Davidson, Director, Public Library Services Branch
        Peace Library System Member Municipalities
        Peace Library System Board Members