



September 27th, 2019

Okanagan Regional Library Board of Directors
Karla Kozakevich, Board Chair

Dear Ms. Kozakevich and ORL Board members:

The British Columbia Library Association (BCLA) represents over 900 members and includes an additional 1200 individuals and institutions that participate on our Committees and Listservs. What we share, as a library community, is a commitment to core library values that include building an inclusive and equitable society that emphasizes creative and critical thinking, intellectual freedom, and equitable access to information. BCLA's core library values are further expressed by the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA) when it explains that the purpose of libraries is to *safeguard and facilitate access to constitutionally protected expressions of knowledge, imagination, ideas, and opinions, including those which some individuals and groups consider unconventional, unpopular or unacceptable.*

The recommendation to the Okanagan Regional Library Board by CEO Don Nettleton, in the memo of September 9, 2019, has generated considerable concern among BCLA's Board, partners and members as the recommendation contradicts the values and purposes of libraries in British Columbia and in Canada.

Mr. Nettleton's memo recommends that the ORL Board develop a policy that *children's programming should be provided in a manner that is safe, professional, and deemed acceptable by the bulk of society (aimed at the middle of the road) to avoid controversy and be as well accepted in the community as possible.*

BCLA's concern is that such a description of children's programming, or any library programming, is limiting, intolerant and excludes segments of the communities libraries serve. There is no evidence, presented or noted in the memo, to support Mr. Nettleton's claim that the Drag Queen Story time, as an example of unacceptable programming, is unsafe, unprofessional, or unacceptable to the community. Nor is there evidence to suggest that a Drag Queen Story time, or any story time, influences or promotes *discussions related to sexual orientation, gender selection, religious teaching, politics, or other divisive issues.*

There is considerable evidence, including the number of adults and children who participated in the Drag Queen Story time, to suggest that community members felt safe and welcomed by their local library branch and enjoyed a program that was mounted by staff who are professionally engaged with community members on a daily basis. Additional evidence from sources such as the Canadian Pediatric Society, the British Columbia Ministry of Education's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Suite 150 - 900 Howe Street, Vancouver BC, Canada V6Z 2M4

Tel: (604) 683-5354

execdir@bcla.bc.ca www.bclacconnect.bc.ca



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(SOGI) framework (now in all 60 school districts in BC), and the “Healthy Gender Development and Young Children” report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services demonstrate that discussions about gender identities are beneficial for children's healthy development.

The contents and recommendations in Mr. Nettleton’s memo contradict both overall library values as well as the stated values and policies of the Okanagan Regional Library. Okanagan Regional Library’s stated values, including an emphasis on learning and discovery, equity, intellectual freedom and connecting people, are commendable and could act as a model for other libraries. Any decision by the Board to limit library programming as per Mr. Nettleton’s memo would undermine those values.

BCLA recognizes and supports the ORL Board’s role and responsibility to create policies that support the work of the library and meet the needs of communities. We ask the ORL Board to consider this work based on shared library values including those core values that support inclusivity, diversity, and intellectual freedom and reject censorship, prejudice, preconceptions about communities, and limiting the role of the library in society.

Should the ORL Board want or require further information BCLA would work with our partners, the BC Library Trustees Association and the Association of BC Public Library Directors to provide support.

Thank you for considering our request,

Sincerely,

Christine Middlemass
President
BC Library Association

Cc:
Scott Hargrove
Chair, Association of BC Public Library Directors
Mike Gagel
President, BC Library Trustee Association
Babs Kelly
Executive Director, BC Library Trustees Association