



British Columbia Library Association
#150-900 Howe Street
Vancouver, BC V6Z 2M4

April 1, 2019

Alix-Rae Stefanko
Canadian Federation of Library Associations
Toronto, ON

RE: Letter of support to Vancouver Public Library

Dear Alix-Rae,

We're writing to you in the spirit of open dialogue to share a concern about the letter CFLA wrote to the Vancouver Public Library on January 15 2019, which supports VPL's position on community use of their rented public spaces and on intellectual freedom. To be clear we are not challenging CFLA's intellectual freedom statement nor is this a criticism of VPL's handling of a complex situation. Instead our concern is twofold. One, as a federation of associations, CFLA is meant to represent its members, specifically provincial and territorial library associations, and does not have the mandate to represent the interests, or respond to the needs, of individual libraries who are not direct members of CFLA. By responding to a request from an individual library system, CFLA does not act as a federation of library associations.

Second, we feel it is especially important for us to understand who CFLA represents when engaging on topics such as intellectual freedom, equal access, and diversity and inclusion. These are core library values and concepts that are both complex, and can come into conflict. When our values are challenged, as they are being challenged in British Columbia, BCLA believes that the significant response is to support inclusive dialogue, discussion and debate. Acknowledging and openly discussing the complexity of this challenge to our understanding of intellectual freedom is critical if we want to move forward as a cohesive library community. In writing this letter in support of VPL, which included the statement of being "the national voice for library communities," CFLA has not encouraged the open dialogue we urgently need in the face of a complex issue with no clear consensus, but rather has had the perhaps unintended effect of shutting the conversation down.



For CFLA to respond to a non-member, individual library is, to our understanding of the federation model, out of CFLA's scope. Although we recognize the difficult decision VPL made, we feel the issue is too important to leave there. To uphold the core values of libraries, they need to be tested, debated, and held to highest level of ethical and intellectual rigour. We hope that CFLA might consider being part of such dialogue among its members in future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Shirley Lew".

Shirley Lew
President
British Columbia Library Association

CC: Katherine McColgan