



Wapiti Regional Library

Serving Central Saskatchewan

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement from Saskatchewan Information & Library Services (SILS) to Saskatchewan Residents on the Impact of the Provincial Budget Cuts

Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, April 4, 2017: Effective April 10, 2017, as a result of the budget cuts to Saskatchewan's public libraries, a critical service that made all Saskatchewan public library materials available province-wide will be disabled. This service—established in 2009 by the Saskatchewan Information & Library Services (SILS) consortium—allowed all Saskatchewan residents with a library card to place holds on materials from any library province-wide. The requested material would then be delivered to their local branch.

Saskatchewan's "One Card, One Library" services were designed to provide equitable access to library materials across the province. This service was used 693,112 times in 2016 and has been touted nationally as a sterling example of collaboration and resource sharing. However, with provincial library funding being severely cut—or, in the case of Saskatoon and Regina, completely eliminated—services like this will necessarily follow suit.

Previously, SILS gave Saskatchewan residents access to a borrowing catalogue of approximately 3.6 million items. Now, with people only able to borrow from within their own library systems, selection will be cut drastically. For example, in Wapiti library users will have access to just over 500,000 items, but will lose access to approximately 3,000,000 items.

While the SILS consortium regrets having to make this decision, there will be many more difficult decisions to face in the coming weeks relating to how, and if, many of Saskatchewan's public libraries can move forward at all.

The provincial cuts, while significant for municipal library systems (Saskatoon and Regina), leaving a minimum of a \$650,000 shortfall in their operating budgets, will be devastating for regional libraries. Regional systems rely heavily on provincial grants to operate, and have now had their operating budgets reduced by 58% (totaling \$3.5 million). With operating budgets being cut across the province, all of the library systems will be forced to make changes to the level of services available, and some systems may simply be unable to continue providing services altogether.

Although the 2017/18 provincial budget does provide funds for the transportation of materials between library systems, this funding falls far short of the full scope of costs associated with the One Card, One Library service. The funding from the provincial government allows for the transportation of materials between the headquarter location of each library system. Each library system is then responsible for the costs of transporting the materials from the headquarter location to the individual branches. With the drastic budget cuts, there is far less funding for the transport of materials between headquarters and rural library locations. Losing critical operating funding for Regional Office facilities, utilities, and staffing, as well as providing programs and collections in regional branch libraries, means libraries no longer have the capacity to support services such as this.

Another service made possible through SILS allows Saskatchewan library card holders to physically borrow from the collection of any library system in the province, and then return these materials to their home library location. For example, Yorkton residents could visit a Saskatoon Public Library location, sign out materials, and then return the materials in Yorkton. Now, due to budget cuts and the related decrease in economical transportation options, the SILS Board will be asking the public to return materials directly to the locations from which they were borrowed. It will take further study to determine if SILS can continue to support this aspect of the One Card philosophy.

As per provincial budget allocations, the Interlibrary Loans programs (which allows for loans between provinces) will continue.

Libraries have a rich and well-documented history of helping build strong, healthy communities, and are particularly important during economic downturns. These most recent library budget cuts will prove especially damaging to our province's most vulnerable—specifically the economically disadvantaged and newcomers—as well as those in rural communities.

Recognizing their place as a vital public service, many other governments across Canada and around the world are re-investing in public libraries to augment critically important programs and services. Increasingly, libraries are much more than book repositories. They are technologically-vibrant hubs of creativity and community meeting spaces that uphold core democratic values, such as equality, diversity and intellectual freedom. While we strive to leave no one behind, these dramatic and unanticipated budget cuts have significantly blurred the future of Saskatchewan's public libraries.

For more information about SILS visit sasklibraries.ca.