



Canadian Federation of Library Associations  
Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques

## COMMUNIQUÉ

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### **HAMILTON, August 4, 2020 – CFLA-FCAB Response to Globe and Mail op-ed**

CFLA-FCAB is the united voice of Canada's libraries. CFLA-FCAB influences public policy, advances library excellence, and raises the visibility of libraries in Canada to advance our national intellectual, social, economic, and cultural success. To this end, Board members and member associations of CFLA-FCAB add their endorsement to sectoral responses to Ken Whyte's opinion piece in the *Globe and Mail* on July 25, entitled *Overdue: Throwing the Book at Libraries*. The article has drawn reaction from a variety of sources and CFLA-FCAB is gratified by the positive, supportive tone of responses from across the country.

Kate Edwards, Executive Director, Association of Canadian Publishers, submitted this letter to the *Globe and Mail* editor:

*"Canadian publishers recognize that public libraries are an important part of the reading ecosystem, and a primary channel for book discovery, particularly in communities that are not well-served by physical bookstores. Library sales are also an important part of the publishing business model, which benefits from a mix of revenue streams and promotional channels. Readers are best served when public libraries purchase and promote a diversity of material, including books by local authors published by independent Canadian presses. Increased investment in and attention to these efforts is critical to building a strong reading and literary culture. Publishers and librarians are well-poised to pursue these shared goals in partnership, to the benefit of readers, writers, and local communities."*

The Chair of Canadian Urban Libraries Council and Treasurer to CFLA-FCAB, Mary Chevreau also responded in a letter that was denied print in the *Globe and Mail* but picked up by *Publisher's Weekly* on July 31:

*"Contrary to Whyte's assertions, public libraries are in fact good for bookstores, publishing, and authors. Public libraries purchase and promote a diversity of material from a wide range of sources, including books by local authors published by independent Canadian presses. And research shows library borrowers are also book buyers. [Booknet Canada researched the intersection of library use and book buying](#) and found that Canadians who both buy and borrow books from the library purchase more books on average per month than buyers who do not use the library at all. By exposing people to ideas and content they wouldn't otherwise think to purchase, libraries help people read more. Libraries are not taking away market share from bookstores, we are making the market bigger for everyone."*

On July 28, The *Globe and Mail* printed an article entitled "How Public Libraries Play a Vital Role in Restoring the Economy." Although not a direct response to the op-ed, the piece details the essential community benefits offered by public libraries and quotes the president and chief executive of the Canadian Urban Institute, Mary Rowe:

*"A library is as much an economic service as anything else," she says. "To have an economy that functions, you need people who are healthy and able to contribute and who have the skills and resources to participate."*

In her July 27 blog post entitled *A last bastion of equality*, Meera Nair points out:

*"Through municipal taxes, many Canadians already foot the bill for public libraries. Our federal taxes also contribute financial support to aid the writing and publishing of books. (I suspect that if I look hard enough, I would see evidence of provincial funding in support of possibly both libraries and writers' grants.) These contributions are effectively set by a means test; poorer Canadians likely do not pay property taxes and may not rise to the level of taxable income. If Whyte wishes to petition all levels of government to increase taxation on those who can afford it, and direct the monies raised to libraries, I would happily support his efforts.*

*But to suggest a user fee for Public Libraries is repugnant. A public library may be a last bastion of equality in modern society; it is a truly egalitarian space where all individuals have equal access to the same services regardless of income, class, or status." (from Fair Duty, A last bastion of equality, accessed July 28, Meera Nair)*

Michael Geist added to the dialogue with a July 30 blog post entitled "A Quarter-Billion Dollar Bag of Beans: Responding to Ken Whyte's Attack on Library Book Loans:"

*Ken Whyte's Globe and Mail op-ed on "throwing the book at libraries" over their effect on booksellers and authors is an outlier that is typically best left ignored. Days after the Globe devoted three pages to the op-ed decrying library book loans, there have been some notable responses from people such as Meera Nair and Brewster Kahle, but not even a tweet from groups such as the Association of Canadian Publishers, Access Copyright, or the Writers' Union of Canada that the piece purports to support. I suspect that this is because there is no there there: libraries are widely regarded as essential community resources that play a critical role in learning, access to knowledge, community integration, and discovery of books. If anything, there is concern that libraries are facing significant budget cuts, which may adversely affect smaller and rural communities.*

The challenge to Whyte's arguments has come from numerous sectors as has the strong support for public libraries. Subsequent letters to the editor of the Globe have been overwhelmingly supportive of the work of Canadian libraries and library staff. CFLA-FCAB advocates for libraries of all types across the nation who support Canadian publishing and publishing supply chains. Authors and researchers depend on Canadian libraries for access to material in support of their own creative and academic endeavours. We are grateful for the support of publishers and look forward to continued conversation and collaboration with our Canadian publishing partners.

The Canadian Federation of Library Associations/Fédération Canadienne des associations de bibliothèques (CFLA-FCAB) is the national voice of Canada's library associations. Our purpose is to advance library excellence in Canada, champion library values and the value of libraries and influence national and international public policy impacting libraries and their communities.

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For more information please contact:

Rebecca Raven  
Executive Director  
raven@cfla-fcab.ca

55 Trenholme Crescent  
Hamilton ON L8W 2L5