

Lily Kwok, she/her
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Dear Lily,

Thank you for reaching out to the Ontario Greens. We appreciate the opportunity to speak on these important issues.

Please find responses on behalf of the party below.

1. Ontario Digital Public Library

Ontario's public libraries are essential to equitable, reliable access to broadband internet and computers. They are especially vital for many rural, Northern and First Nations communities where at home connectivity is limited, and for hundreds of thousands of Ontarians that cannot afford in-home internet services or technology.

In particular, many Ontarians rely on local public libraries for access to digital and online resources, which contribute to student success and life-long learning, as well as towards entrepreneurship and job readiness. These include:

- in-depth job and career skills training;
- language learning;
- live tutoring and homework help;
- health information; and
- resources to support vulnerable residents, such as seniors and adults living with developmental disabilities.

By following the well-established approach used in Alberta and Saskatchewan and leveraging volume purchasing through an annual provincial investment, as well as existing public library infrastructure, the Ontario Digital Public Library could provide a universal set of the highest-impact digital resources to every public library – and every Ontarian – at an overall cost savings of up to 40% when compared to library-by-library subscription.

An annual investment between \$10 million - \$20 million will provide every public library in Ontario – and the millions of Ontarians that use them – with consistent access to a core suite of online resources that contribute to skills development and online learning, and annual operating costs for staff, support and supplies.

Do you agree that the Ontario Government should explore the creation of a provincially-funded Ontario Digital Public Library to give all Ontarians access to a universal set of high-quality e-learning & online resources through their local public library?

Yes

Ontario Greens believe that knowledge is power. A provincially-funded Ontario Digital Public Library would ensure that all Ontarians have access to a universal set of high-quality e-learning & online resources.

2. Helping Libraries Meet Local Needs

Public libraries in Ontario have received no increase in provincial funding support (Provincial Libraries Operating Grant, or PLOG) in over 25 years, during which time the value of the province's investment in public libraries has decreased by over 60 per cent. Although over 90 per cent of public library funding is provided by the local municipal government, provincial operating funding provides critical stability to public library budgets. Libraries have adapted and maximized the impact of every dollar despite inflation, substantial changes in technology, and the increasing importance of libraries as a vital community hub and public resource.

Ontario's public libraries are proposing a targeted investment of additional operating funding for public libraries to specifically address critical areas of shared community and provincial priority, including:

- Supporting local economic readiness through job training and skills development;
- Addressing the community impacts of mental health and addictions;
- Providing services and resources to assist with high-needs members of the community such as seniors, newcomers, working families and all vulnerable members; and
- Supporting early literacy and K-12 success.

This investment, which would be in addition to and separate from existing provincial operating funding under the PLOG, would be shared across hundreds of Ontario libraries to provide predictable, flexible funding for local public libraries to respond to these critical areas of focus based on the needs of the people and the local communities they serve.

Do you agree that the Ontario Government should increase provincial operating funding for Ontario's public libraries to address critical shared priorities and community needs?

Yes.

Ontario Greens are committed to increasing funding for local libraries, community centres and neighbourhood coalitions, which play an important role in encouraging community connections and reducing isolation for elders.

3. Continuing Support for Libraries in First Nations Communities

Public libraries on reserve serve as an accessible gathering place and information sharing resource for First Nations communities. They are deeply important to maintaining a sense of community and to minimizing social isolation, many of which are remote or face systemic social and economic challenges.

Public libraries on reserve are chronically under-funded. The municipal tax revenue used to support most public libraries does not exist for public libraries in First Nation communities.

Many public libraries on reserve operate with only one staff person who is expected to perform many functions. Public libraries on reserve need additional funding to provide staff with a living wage and to increase staffing levels so that they can meet their communities' needs for library programs and services.

In recognition of the significant financial barriers faced by First Nations Public Libraries on reserve, the Ontario Government made a multi-million-dollar enhancement through the 2024 Ontario Budget to both the First Nation Salary Supplement and Public Library Operating Grant funding. This investment amounted to \$1.25 million in additional, ongoing annual funding. This is a vital first step to restoring stability to First Nations Public Libraries on reserve; however, there is more work to be done to ensure these libraries can continue to perform their unique role of serving their communities and preserving cultural memory.

Do you agree that the Ontario Government should work with First Nations Public Library leaders towards on a sustainable funding and operating model to preserve the long-term viability of these important local hubs?

Yes.

Ontario Greens believe in the value of including communities in the development of the programs and policies that are meant to serve them. This kind of consultation and collaboration improves the quality of services offered and boosts long-term viability of important community hubs.

4. Restore and Enhance Protection of Provincial Funding for School Libraries

School libraries are at the heart of student literacy achievement. Literacy and critical research skills are foundational to student success in STEM and other key subject areas. Teacher-librarians serve as literacy leaders and provide support and expertise while working alongside classroom teachers to meet literacy and curriculum objectives. Despite the importance of school libraries and staff to achieving Ontario's literacy objectives, student access to school libraries has significantly declined over the past 20 years.

Unfortunately, Ontario's new Core Education Funding Model, introduced last spring, is putting school libraries at further immediate risk. The new model:

- Eliminated protected funding for school libraries and library staff.
- Put library staff funding in the same category as materials like Chromebooks and

crayons.

- School boards are no longer required to report to the Ministry of Education on how or if they are funding school libraries – a requirement previously introduced by the Ontario Government in 2021.

Do you agree that the Ontario Government should:

- Update the Core Education Funding Model to create a defined sub-allocation for all school libraries and staffing funding, consistent with the provincial per-student formula;
- Update the Funding Model to fully protect these allocations; and
- Restore the annual reporting and accountability requirements regarding school libraries for school boards and implement recommended enhancements previously submitted to the Ministry of Education by the OSLA.

Yes

Ontario Greens know that community hubs like libraries are the lifeblood of our neighbourhoods – bringing people together, keeping kids and seniors active and healthy, and providing us with daily essentials. But these community hubs don't happen by accident— we need to create the necessary conditions in order for them to open, and stay open.

Thank you again for reaching out.

All the best,

Madeleine Crist
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