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Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health and Deputy Premier, MPP Newmarket-Aurora.

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To the Honourable Christine Elliot, M.P.P for Newmarket-Aurora.

On behalf of our community we would like to thank you for your dedication demonstrated throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. We would also like to congratulate your government for successfully establishing the 2021 *Ontario Action Plan: Protecting People's Health and Our Economy*. It is clear from the provincial budget that your government has deliberated long and hard to determine a strong path forward. The Newmarket Public Library would like to recognize the value that supporting broadband and connectivity initiatives will have on our sector and the economy as a whole.

Throughout the pandemic Newmarket Public Library (NPL) has worked tirelessly to continue to provide supportive services for our community in strict accordance with the emergency public health guidelines. Balancing the importance of public health measures with the needs of our community has brought two issues into sharp focus: late fees as a barrier to equitable access, and the importance of digital materials in the modern economy.

Libraries across Canada have long recognized that late fees are a barrier to access that disproportionately affects individuals already experiencing socio-economic difficulty. While late fees are an important revenue stream for many libraries, NPL made the decision to remove them early in the pandemic and continues to be fine free as a way to promote online access and physical distancing measures. During this novel situation, the Library has seen the benefit for families with young children, individuals with medical concerns, and older adults who do not need to worry about an interruption to service if they are having trouble scheduling a safe visit to the library.

The Ontario Library Association and the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries have raised this issue among others in their 2021 Pre-Budget Submission *Supporting the Recovery of Ontario's Public Libraries & Communities from COVID-19* (attached). During the March 17th meeting of the Newmarket Public Library Board, the Board endorsed the requests contained in the pre-budget submission and hope that your government will keep these requests in mind for the 2022 provincial budget cycle.

Thank you.

Darcy McNeill
Library Board Chair
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Cc: Hon. Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries
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