



August 30, 2021

Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Leader, Liberal Party of Canada
350 Albert Street, Suite 920
Ottawa, Ontario
K1P 6M8

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:

We are writing on behalf of the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) and the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA). We are seeking your commitment to confirm that long-term sustainable funding will be provided to ensure equitable access to reading for those people across Canada with print disabilities should the Liberal Party form government after this election.

CELA and NNELS, which is a project of the BC Library Co-operative, are national not-for-profit organizations that provide accessible reading services to the approximately 3 million people across Canada with print disabilities. Current federal funding for the provision of accessible reading services of \$4 million annually is scheduled to be eliminated in 2024-2025 which will have a significant negative impact on this vulnerable group. We welcomed a restoration of planned reductions for 2021-2022 announced earlier this year but remain deeply concerned about the future planned cuts.

Print disabilities encompass those who are blind or visually impaired, people with cognitive disabilities such as dyslexia and those with physical disabilities that make it difficult to read a physical book. These services ensure that people with print disabilities across the country are more able to fully participate in learning, work and community life and contribute to the social, cultural, and economic development and success of their local communities and Canada as a whole.

We ask that a funding commitment recognize the following principles:

- **Ensure that all content can be made accessible to a diverse community of people with print disabilities.**

It is estimated that only 7-10% of the world's published content is available in accessible format(s). Canadian and multinational publishers can not (and will not) ensure that all titles will be commercially available in all accessible formats

- **Recognizing that people with print disabilities face economic and social barriers that industry-based production and distribution will not be able to fully address.**

A publicly-funded service needs to be provided to those users who do not have the economic means to gain access to accessible content.

- **Support for multiple formats, including braille, is essential for an equitable reading landscape.**

Many accessible formats, such as braille, are not viable formats in the marketplace, and publicly-funded services such as NNELS and CELA are needed to ensure equitable access to all formats.

- **Access to published works for people with print disabilities internationally through the Marrakesh Treaty should be facilitated by organizations that are independent from industry.**

The federal government has a responsibility to fulfill the requirements of the Marrakesh Treaty and must be prepared to continue to fund organizations, like CELA and NNELS, that currently perform this essential service.

- **Accessibility expertise and equitable reading must be supported and made available independent of market forces.**

Organizations like CELA and NNELS have expertise in accessible reading content and can ensure that these services and issues continue to be at the forefront.

- **Mainstream reading systems, tools, and devices can be complicated and expensive, and support for the provision of accessible services will continue to be essential.**

Both CELA and NNELS offer a repository of reading content for people with print disabilities that provide an essential accessible national reading service.

We would be happy to further discuss the need for this commitment with you and your team over the course of the election campaign.

Yours sincerely,



Kevin Millsip
Executive Director,
BC Library Co-operative/NNELS



Laurie Davidson
Executive Director,
CELA