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Cost-cutting forces closure of borders between libraries

Effective this morning, electronic borders between Saskatchewan libraries are closing, meaning customers will no longer have access to the province-wide range of materials they've been using for decades. All Saskatchewan regional libraries and its two urban libraries issued statements this morning regarding this change.

"With a single stroke of its red pen, the provincial government has closed the borders between libraries in this province," Sean Quinlan, Chair of the RPL Board of Directors, said. "What was once a nationally-recognized system of sharing and efficiency is no longer sustainable."

In 2016, 693,000 holds were filled between libraries across the province. Effective today (April 4), anything requested from libraries in other regions will not be filled unless it is already in transit. The system will begin to prohibit the ability for customers to place holds on materials from other regions on Monday (April 10).

"This system provided free access to learning, literacy resources, and entertainment regardless of where people chose to live," Quinlan said. "By closing off resources available to smaller centres, the government has created a two-tiered system of library services in this province."

Without the resources available at regional library headquarters, citizens in rural Saskatchewan will have limited access to library materials. Larger urban libraries will continue, however they lack the resources needed to share materials across the province.

"Regina Public Library has to narrow its focus and limit sharing of resources with other parts of the province," Quinlan said. "That is directly contrary to what a library should be – a welcoming centre of learning and literacy for anyone who wants to use it."

RPL is presently reviewing its own budget and determining the degree to which customers living outside city limits can access its materials. "Branches such as Sunrise at the edge of the city are accessed by hundreds of users from the surrounding area," Quinlan said. "As much as we don't want to limit access to these loyal customers, we may have to."

Interlibrary loans – the system used to provide access to materials from across Canada – will continue at Regina Public Library. However, the system is not equipped to manage the quantity of materials once shipped throughout the province.

Reciprocal borrowing – the ability for any Saskatchewan resident to use any public library in the province – will also continue for RPL. "We'll monitor usage and costs for a period of time before we determine whether this service can continue," Quinlan said.

Regina Public Library will host two information sessions regarding the effect of the provincial budget cuts on Regina's public library and the Saskatchewan libraries system. The sessions will be April 12 & 13 at 7:30 in the Central Library mezzanine, 2311 – 12th Avenue.

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