



July 22, 2016

Via email: Louis.Sebert@gov.nt.ca

The Honourable Louis Sebert
Minister of Justice
Minister Responsible for the Northwest Territories Power Corporation
P.O. Box 1320
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9

Dear Minister Sebert:

Re: Closure of M.M. de Weert Law Library

I write to you as President of the Canadian Bar Association (CBA) about the imminent closure of the M.M. deWeert Law Library in the Yellowknife Courthouse. I understand that the Government of the Northwest Territories has decided to close the Law Library despite significant concerns raised by the Bar and the public. The GNWT, like many Canadian governments, is experiencing a period of fiscal restraint, but decisions like these have detrimental impacts on access to justice, particularly in rural and remote environments.

The CBA is a national association of 36,000 lawyers, Québec notaries, law teachers and students, with a mandate to promote improvements in the law and the administration of justice.

The M.M. deWeert Law Library is the only law library in the Northwest Territories for use by all residents. Public law libraries provide vital resources to the profession, especially for small and sole practitioners who cannot afford secondary resources to provide effective services to their clients. Similarly, self-represented litigants benefit from the resources at a law library, including invaluable access to a law librarian. Self-represented individuals already face the challenge in understanding the law. Having to navigate online legal search engines will be yet another barrier.

The CBA's 2013 Reaching Equal Justice report emphasizes legal literacy as a means of improving access to justice in Canada. All Canadians need resources to build their own legal capabilities. To this end, the public needs appropriately-resourced spaces where legal information is shared in an accessible fashion. We believe Yellowknife's public law library is one of these spaces.

I urge you to reconsider the decision to close the law library. If the decision to close it is confirmed, I urge you to delay the closing until the GNWT has an appropriate alternative plan to provide residents of the Northwest Territories with access to law library resources. Without these recourses, both the legal community and the public will suffer a great disadvantage in navigating the complex justice system.

Yours truly

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Janet", followed by a long horizontal flourish that ends in a small arrowhead pointing to the right.

Janet M. Fuhrer