



Vancouver Public Library
Office of the Chair

June 20, 2019

Glendyne Gerrard
Director, Defend Dignity
7560 Airport Road, Unit 10
Mississauga, ON L4T 4H4

Dear Ms. Gerrard,

In a recent letter you requested that the Vancouver Public Library install Internet filters on all Internet work stations and our wireless network as a technological limit on accessing adult content.

As a public library our role is to enrich and empower lives and build community by providing universal access to the world's information and ideas. Internet access via library workstations and public wireless network is essential to fulfilling this role and is a core library service.

Access to the Internet has been a cornerstone of VPL's collections and information services provision since early 1996 when public Internet access was first introduced. The Internet serves as an extension of our collections and is one of the richest information resources available to the public. Providing access to free public Internet has become even more critical over the years as educational, informational, commercial, social, and civic engagement opportunities shift to web based digital formats.

Intellectual freedom, freedom of thought and expression of thought, as well as freedom of information are fundamental principles in public library service. Such freedom of access to information is essential to the health and development of a democratic society. VPL's commitment to these principles is reflected in our *Public Internet and Computer Usage Policy* ([link](#)) as well as our *Collection Development Policy* ([link](#)), the latter which also embeds an endorsement of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations' *Statement of Intellectual Freedom* (attached).

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VPL's core services are informed by procedural frameworks, service models, and policies. The VPL Board's *Public Internet and Computer Usage Policy* was first passed in August 2000 and has been revised and updated on a regular basis to align with the changing nature of technology and Internet access, to ensure that VPL libraries are safe and comfortable for all patrons, and to support staff and security personnel in applying the policy.

The most recent revision of the *Public Internet and Computer Usage Policy* occurred in July 2014. This revision contemplated the qualities of a respectful public space, the rights of individuals, and the research and information needs of our patrons. Additions to the policy allowed for a more assertive approach to free public Internet use with regard to preventing the viewing of overtly sexualized content. Implementation of the policy occurred in June 2015, following the development of a robust procedural framework and staff training. Ongoing review of the policy and related practices is part of our public service training for staff. Concurrent with the roll out of the revised policy was an update to the terms of use page that patrons must acknowledge as they access the Internet, which included the changes to the policy.

The following clauses were added to the policy in July 2014;

- *Users must not use any workstation or the public wireless network to display explicit sexual images.*
- *Staff will advise users of inappropriate conduct as required and will ask that any behavior deemed to be inappropriate cease immediately. Violations may result in loss of privileges for both the user and the card(s) used.*

The changes to the *Public Internet and Computer Usage Policy* make it clear that displaying explicit sexual images is not permitted. VPL facilities are for everyone's use and enjoyment and staff are responsible for ensuring that our policies are applied and that the library is a welcoming space.

Our policy does not permit the use of content limitations, with the exception of a provision for Internet stations in children's areas:

Internet workstations in children's areas will have a commercial content filter. In those branches which do not have Internet stations in the children's area, at least one terminal with a filter will be made available elsewhere in the branch. The Library will not alter the commercial content filter. This policy is consistent with our book and materials collection policy, which stresses that the children's collections be appropriate for the ages and interests of children.



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In 2018, our Internet workstations were used over 909,000 hours across our 21 locations. In the same timeframe, over 997,000 wireless sessions were logged at VPL. This data demonstrates how essential this service is in our community and confirms our position on the need for open, unrestricted access to the Internet.

A review of our 2018 security incidents shows that reported incidents of members of the public viewing sexually explicit images is less than 1% of our security incidents. This represents a decline from previous years, which were also extremely low given the hours of Internet use in the library. Since implementing the revised policy, our experience has been that the majority of our patrons comply with the policy and that VPL has been successful in creating a welcoming space.

While recognizing the right of individuals and groups to criticize our practices, we do not allow the freedom of choice and information within the Library to be limited by the personal views of any group or individual and therefore will not be revising our *Public Internet and Computer Usage Policy* to permit the use of filters on Internet stations in adult areas or our wireless network.

The Library Board accepts public delegations to Board meetings, and if you would like to address the Board on this topic, you are welcome to apply to be a delegation to present further information. Please contact Chrysalyn Tolentino, Executive Assistant to the Library Board at chrysalyn.tolentino@vpl.a or 604-331-4003 for further information on public delegations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Schaub', written over a light blue horizontal line.

John Schaub,
Chair, VPL Board

cc: Nancy Brown, Vancouver, BC

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Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries

Approval History: June 27, 1974 Amended November 17, 1983; November 18, 1985; and September 27, 2015

The Canadian Federation of Library Associations recognizes and values the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as the guarantor of the fundamental freedoms in Canada of conscience and religion; of thought, belief, opinion, and expression; of peaceful assembly; and of association.

The Canadian Federation of Library Associations supports and promotes the universal principles of intellectual freedom as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which include the interlocking freedoms to hold opinions and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

In accordance with these principles, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations affirms that all persons in Canada have a fundamental right, subject only to the Constitution and the law, to have access to the full range of knowledge, imagination, ideas, and opinion, and to express their thoughts publicly. Only the courts may abridge free expression rights in Canada.

The Canadian Federation of Library Associations affirms further that libraries have a core responsibility to support, defend and promote the universal principles of intellectual freedom and privacy.

The Canadian Federation of Library Associations holds that libraries are a key institution in Canada for rendering expressive content accessible and affordable to all. Libraries are essential gateways for all persons living in Canada to advance themselves through literacy, lifelong learning, social engagement, and cultural enrichment.

Libraries have a core responsibility to safeguard and facilitate access to constitutionally protected expressions of knowledge, imagination, ideas, and opinion, including those which some

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individuals and groups consider unconventional, unpopular or unacceptable. To this end, in accordance with their mandates and professional values and standards, libraries provide, defend and promote equitable access to the widest possible variety of expressive content and resist calls for censorship and the adoption of systems that deny or restrict access to resources.

Libraries have a core responsibility to safeguard and foster free expression and the right to safe and welcoming places and conditions. To this end, libraries make available their public spaces and services to individuals and groups without discrimination.

Libraries have a core responsibility to safeguard and defend privacy in the individual's pursuit of expressive content. To this end, libraries protect the identities and activities of library users except when required by the courts to cede them.

Furthermore, in accordance with established library policies, procedures and due process, libraries resist efforts to limit the exercise of these responsibilities while recognizing the right of criticism by individuals and groups.

Library employees, volunteers and employers as well as library governing entities have a core responsibility to uphold the principles of intellectual freedom in the performance of their respective library roles.

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