April 30, 2020

Hon. Bill Morneau, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Finance
90 Elgin St.
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0G5

Dear Minister Morneau:

Thank you for the work you are doing in helping to provide support to Canadians impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Incorporated in 2008, the Canadian Urban Libraries Council / Conseil des Bibliothèques Urbaines du Canada (CULC/CBUC) facilitates collaboration and research to strengthen and promote the value of Canada’s urban public libraries as integral to a vibrant democracy, strong economy and thriving communities. CULC/CBUC members include the 44 largest public library systems in Canada, along with Library and Archives Canada and the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec. Over 8,300 people are employed full-time by CULC/CBUC members and 70 per cent of Canadians are served by a CULC/CBUC member library.

We are seeking an immediate change to the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) to ensure municipal and library employees temporarily laid off due to COVID-19 can access an employer-paid supplementary benefit in addition to the $2,000 per month CERB and exceed the $1,000 per month in additional employment income currently permitted. This would ensure the CERB is consistent with the ability to provide an employer-paid Supplemental Unemployment Benefit (SUB) plan as per the Employment Insurance Act and enable public libraries to continue to support employees during this very challenging period. This would come at no additional expense to the federal government.

Many municipal and library employees were informed of temporary lay off in advance of the CERB being established and were informed that supplemental income would be allowable as permitted under the Employment Insurance Act. A change to allow additional SUB income under the CERB program would provide municipalities with the needed flexibility to honour agreements made to employees at the time of the temporary lay off.

The precedence for this type of policy change is already established with the modifications made to the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) whereby employers are expected to do their best to restore employees’ wages to their pre-crisis levels. While municipalities and public libraries are not eligible for the CEWS, CULC/CBUC members wish to operate with the same principle of fairness to our employees. This requested policy change ensures municipal and library employees have similar access to benefits as private sector employees and comes at no cost to the federal government.
We urge you to please give this request your most timely and serious consideration and we are prepared to discuss this issue further on an urgent basis with yourself and officials within your department.

Yours sincerely,

Pilar Martinez
Chair, Canadian Urban Libraries Council / Conseil des Bibliothèques Urbaines du Canada
Chief Executive Officer, Edmonton Public Library

cc:   Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, P.C, M.P.
      Prime Minister of Canada

      Hon. Carla Qualtrough, P.C., M.P.
      Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion

      Mr. Graham Flack
      Deputy Minister of Employment, Social Development Canada

      Mr. Paul Rochon
      Deputy Minister of Finance

      Mr. Sean Casey
      Chair, Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

      Mr. Brock Carlton
      Chief Executive Officer, Federation of Canadian Municipalities