

March 6, 2024

Hon. Todd McCarthy
Minister of Public and Business Service Delivery
College Park 5th Flr,
777 Bay St, Toronto,
ON M7A 2J3

Sent via email: todd.mccarthy@ontario.ca

Dear Minister McCarthy,

Re: Delivering Easier and More Convenient Access to ServiceOntario Through Public Libraries

Local public libraries are Ontario's farthest-reaching, most cost-effective public resource and community hubs. Millions of Ontarians rely on local public libraries in their communities: to work, to learn, to develop in-demand skills, and connect to vital community and government services.

We share your conviction that Ontarians should have easier and more convenient access to government services through ServiceOntario. We were encouraged to learn in late January that the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery (MPBSD) is considering the role that public libraries could play as part of this solution. Across Ontario, we know that thousands of library customers already visit their local branch for assistance with ServiceOntario transactions.

Public libraries are uniquely suited to host ServiceOntario service delivery for two primary reasons:

- **Increased Accessibility and Convenience:** Integrating ServiceOntario within local public libraries can significantly improve access to essential government services, especially for hundreds of thousands of Ontarians residing in small, rural, and Northern communities, many of which are traditionally too small for a dedicated Service Ontario location. This helps eliminate barriers related to travel, transportation, online access, and costs, thereby offering a more convenient and accessible option for residents to renew licenses, health cards, and more.
- **Effective Use of Established Infrastructure:** Public libraries are already well-established, trusted community hubs across Ontario. Utilizing this existing network to deliver government services is both cost-effective while leveraging existing public infrastructure, thereby extending ServiceOntario's reach without the need for additional or specialized locations.

MPBSD and the public library sector have recognized this need and opportunity. Beginning in 2020, the Ministry initiated the design and delivery of a pilot project to provide select ServiceOntario offerings in Essa Public Library. Township of Essa residents could access services at the Angus branch of Essa PL without having to travel great distances to the larger neighbouring municipality of Barrie – reducing or removing impediments for people with limited mobility,

transportation options, or internet access at home. The Essa Public Library pilot represents how select government services can be delivered using existing infrastructure in municipalities without a standalone ServiceOntario location.

The data and feedback collected from this pilot provided important insights. However, given its timing during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as lessons learned in the design and execution, there is both an opportunity and need to explore a refined pilot approach that more effectively targets communities of greatest need and better reconciles the unique balance between ServiceOntario requirements and public library capabilities. Additional pilots in partnership with libraries could help provide a blueprint on how Ontario government services can be better delivered through the trusted, established presence of local public libraries and staff.

We are eager to initiate discussions with the appropriate Ministry officials to discuss how we can build upon recent experience to explore a refreshed and expanded pilot approach on how public libraries can play a pivotal role in ensuring Ontarians have easier, more convenient access to government services in municipalities across the province.

Thank you,



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