



May 6, 2019

Mr. John Schaub, Chair, Library Board
Ms. Christina de Castell, Chief Librarian
Vancouver Public Library
350 W Georgia Street
Vancouver, BC V6B 6B1

Dear Mr. Schaub and Ms. de Castell;

As the most-visited major urban library per capita in Canada, I am encouraged to see that Vancouver Public Library (VPL) recognizes the harms of viewing sexually graphic material on public library terminals, as evidenced in your "Public Internet and Computer Usage" policy.

Your desire to ensure that VPL is a safe and comfortable environment for all patrons, free from harassment, including sexual harassment is commendable. We would ask that you take these efforts one step further, and filter violent, sexually graphic content, pornography, from all VPL internet work stations and public WiFi.

The reason for this request is that today's "adult content" is misogynistic, violent, degrading, racist, and normalizes rape culture. We also know that there is a seamless link between pornography and other forms of sexual exploitation, such as human trafficking, including the trafficking of children.¹

Among the documented harms of pornography is the link between pornography use and sexual violence.²

Dr. Carla Hayden, former President of the American Library Association and current Librarian of Congress, confirmed that pornography has no place in the Library. She also reflected that the quality of filters has improved, addressing previous concerns about over-filtering.

¹Farley, Melissa. "Pornography, Prostitution, & Trafficking: Making the Connections." Presented at the Pornography: a Public Health Crisis forum, hosted by National Center on Sexual Exploitation, Washington DC, July 14, 2015.

²http://www.socialcostsofpornography.com/Layden_Pornography_and_Violence.pdf accessed Nov. 24, 2016

Defend Dignity commends the VPL on the use of filters on computers in their children's areas. As you have cited increased incidences, whether formally reported or not, of patrons viewing inappropriate material and given the harms of today's pornography, we would ask that the VPL further enhance safety for all patrons and staff by researching and installing filters on all internet work stations and WiFi.

Filtering is an important tool which, along with policies and staff intervention, can be used to enhance patron safety. Other libraries that have gone this route have not experienced a decrease in the quality of service to their patrons.

We firmly believe it is possible, through the use of filtering and other tools, to balance the important rights to intellectual freedom and freedom of expression with stringent protections against violent, sexually explicit materials.

A case that is relevant to this discussion is *R v. Butler*, in which the Supreme Court of Canada found that the limiting of Charter rights (in this case, freedom of expression) was warranted to "prevent the harm that may come about from the attitudes promoted by pornography, and thus to minimize dangers to society." The Court further noted that obscenity, in the form of pornography, could encourage degrading views of women and could promote violence, contradicting the view of Canada as a society in which people are equal.³ Please see further details regarding this case and the application to filtering by Public Libraries in the addendum to this letter.

We would concur with the Supreme Court that it is "reasonable in a free and democratic society" to establish limits to freedom of expression and would share their concern regarding the harmful impacts of pornography on adults and society at large. This is why we are writing to you and requesting that the VPL implement technological limits (i.e. filtering) on access to pornography.

In response to the recognition of the public harms of pornography, Defend Dignity has launched the 2019 version of our campaign, *Choose Change*. The goal of this campaign is to reduce the ease of access to violent, sexually explicit images. We would invite you to choose change and join our Change Maker List.

We will be celebrating organizations who have or will make these positive changes by highlighting them on our Change Maker List on the Choose Change website (choosechangecanada.org). The Change Maker List will promote organizations that have pro-actively changed policies and practices to reduce the ease of access to violent, sexually explicit images. We hope you will join us on this List,⁴ and join other Canadian libraries that have chosen change.

As well, we are asking the public to join us in "challenging the harms of sexually violent images." We will do this through the Choose Change website, where we will

³ *R v Butler*, [1992] 1 SCR 48.

⁴ <https://choosechangecanada.org/#change>

ask the public to contact organizations, such as the Vancouver Public Library, to encourage them to change detrimental practices and to embrace safe practices.

Again, we request that you would enhance the protection of patrons by filtering violent, sexually exploitive materials from publicly funded internet access and computers, thereby keeping public spaces free and safe from such toxic material.

We would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you, to discuss this matter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Glendyne Gerrard".

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