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A Better Future for Our Children Depends on Access

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The success of our children will be determined by the opportunities that they have to gain knowledge. If knowledge is power, then a move to restrict access to information will hinder the ability of our children gain knowledge and jeopardize their futures. With the city focused on the projected \$774 million budget shortfall, vital city services like libraries are under the threat of a 'cut, cut, cut' agenda. While responsible spending is a priority for municipal government, it must be done so in a way that nurtures the future. Canada is the best country in the world and Toronto is a world-class city, but cuts to important city's services would no longer make Toronto a global leader. Today, many places like the Malvern Public Library have long line-ups at the beginning of the day. Torontonians of all ages and backgrounds use the public library system, which have become integral community hubs that promote community development and provide access to educational tools and recreational programs.

With Toronto's vast diversity, libraries provide access to a wide range of literature, new immigrants gain language skills, homework assistance and research materials are readily available to students, seniors socialize and participate in activities, and free internet is available to both those who can and cannot afford their own.

With so much to offer the communities they serve, the Toronto Public Library system is one vital resource that should never be cut. Rather, it should be expanded to accommodate more hours and services. Even with one of the highest circulation rates in the world, the Toronto Public Library system is falling behind other nations around the globe and a 10% reduction in its operating budget would do irreparable harm. The elimination of one hundred library staff—representing 5.7% of the cuts—will remove the most knowledgeable resources from where they are most needed. The remaining 4.3% of the cuts will be represented in service cuts that will see a reduction of 19,444 hours of service.

Currently, children in countries such as Japan, South Korea and China have **access to libraries 7-days a week** with library operating hours ranging from 9:00A.M. to 10:00P.M. in Seoul, South Korea; 10:00A.M. to 9:00P.M. in Tokyo, Japan; 9:00A.M. to 9:00P.M. in Beijing, China; and 8:30A.M. to 11:30P.M. in Shanghai, China. Meanwhile, hours of operation for Toronto Public Libraries range from opening between 9:00A.M. – 12:30A.M., and closing between 5:00P.M. – 8:30P.M., with many being **closed at least once a week**. Library branches that do open on Sundays operate from 1:00P.M. to 5:00P.M. until the summer months of July-August, when all Toronto library branches are closed on Sundays.

These cuts will decrease access to libraries and result in 18,400 hours of reduced service across all libraries from Mondays to Saturdays while forcing eight more branches to close on Sundays. Furthermore, a cut of 27% to the Toronto Public Library's collection will make 245,000 new materials unavailable this year. The proposed 10% reduction may result in \$17 million in "cost savings" to the City of Toronto, but will ultimately be a significant decrease of investment in our children's future. In an age of globalization, our children will be competing on an international level and every education resource is a great asset. Therefore, it is our responsibility today to ensure that vital resources—such as public libraries—are protected so that our children do not lose the chance to have a better future.