

Dear West Hants Council Members,

I am writing regarding the Hantsport Public Library closure. I am an employee of the AVRL, and I provide substitute clerk services when I am needed. I spoke to Chrystal Remme on the phone last week, and she suggested I write to you with my concerns.

First, I want to address how this library is used and communicate to you, our representatives, how vitally important this library is to Hantsport and the surrounding communities. The Hantsport Public Library is a place of safety and aid to our most vulnerable community members. During the years I have worked at this library, I have seen the crucial impact we, and the library itself, play in the well-being of the people we serve. I am deeply afraid of what will happen to the community members who rely on us if this library closes. We are not a book depository. We are much more than that. We serve the patrons at the Hantsport Library in a variety of ways:

- helping low-income patrons complete their tax returns.
- helping those who are unable to read by reading important, private documents that they otherwise would be unable to understand.
- providing computers and printing services for those patrons that have no access of their own
- helping the unhoused seek a home, a shelter, food and support.
- helping new immigrants and non-English speakers navigate online, access language learning (several of us with ESL training offered English help in the library itself), access immigration documents and contacts, make friends, and meet community support.
- helping to run a soup program whereby a local farm provides soup that resides in the Hantsport Library freezer for pick up when patrons are in need.
- helping all children, but especially low-income children, access computers, educational games and programs, homework materials and vital supports such as providing ways to contact Kids Help Phone or ways to report abuse, bullying, mental health issues and neglect.
- providing social programs such as
 - after-school crafts, games, songs, and stories
 - Saturday morning story time
 - evening teddy bear/pyjama story time
 - writing programs
 - support programs on death and dying
 - computer literacy
 - literacy and learning to read programs
 - puzzle/board game/chess/ D&D programs
 - morning coffee groups
 - fibre crafts groups

- seniors support programs, and many more.

I have provided a shoulder to lean on, conversation to lonely patrons, solace, snacks and water to the unhoused, and aid to hurt, upset children. It is unacceptable to allow this resource to be removed from our community.

I have concerns around the way CEO Julia Merrit and AVRL board made this decision. These individuals have in the past, been dismissive of the Hantsport Library's unique needs, and they have allowed communities to suffer, all while claiming that deficits are to blame. Library programs were shut down across the AVRL for over 2 years. Staff and patrons were deeply upset by this decision, and our communities suffered as a result. Many staff members asked why? If staff is already present, and the program materials are often free or paid for by external sources (i.e. Friends of the Hantsport Library), why can we not still provide them? Can we bring in volunteers? Why not allow staff members to continue serving their communities? We (AVRL staff) were told not to ask questions. Our voices were silenced and our freedom of speech attacked when we were given a script to follow on how to respond to our community when *they* asked questions. Recently, we were told not to talk to the press. Not to post on social media regarding the closures. I feel this is wrong, and I know I am not alone. While looking for information and speaking to people directly involved in the decision-making process, I have come across some information that should be shared with our community, and that should not be hidden.

- West Hants offered funding twice—once to add funding to the pot with all the municipalities and once that was to be used to serve our West Hants libraries specifically. What happened to that money? If West Hants services the building, and provides funding, why can we not stay open? We only require one part-time staff member to serve. I think we should see the full financial breakdown that informed these decisions.
- In the process of deciding where to make cuts, the board has decided to change the standards with regard to libraries that only require one part-time staff member. We have always had one staff member in Hantsport. Every employee hired to work at our single-person libraries is asked if they are comfortable with that condition, and all of us have said yes. We are all required to be First Aiders so that we can service our patrons properly. Why did this rule come into effect just as closures were being talked about? The only communities that have these one-person libraries are small and often include many low-income and unhoused community members. By creating this rule, the board discriminates against these communities. There are no labour laws that prevent someone from working alone in Nova Scotia. If the board insists on this sudden change, there are other ways to meet the needs of a library without closure, and without incurring the cost of bringing in more staff. Once again, volunteers or external support would be excellent here.

- There has been no recognition that Hantsport is the only community without transit. All our patrons, without transportation, will be effectively cut off from all of the resources listed above. For this reason alone, we should be keeping our library open and available. All of the other libraries on the chopping block are serviced by Kings Transit.

In the unfortunate event that closures move forward, what can be done to keep this resource in our community? Can we align with Halifax Public Libraries? Can the bookmobile be reinstated and the library space manned by volunteers? Can we establish a private library?

Our library belongs to the people of West Hants and Hantsport. They are the safe spaces we pay for in our taxes to make sure everyone in our community has a place to turn to for help, literacy, comfort, and friendship. They are the places we turn to for information, for learning, and to access the magical world of stories and make-believe. It would be morally egregious to deprive this community of the resources they rely on so heavily.

Thank you for your time,

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