

April 8, 2020

The Honorable Blaine Higgs
Premier of New Brunswick
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Dear Mr. Premier:

My name is Sylvie Nadeau. I was the Provincial Librarian/Executive Director of New Brunswick Public Library Service (NBPLS) for 20 years, until my retirement at the end of December 2019.

I just returned from a 2-month vacation out of the country to celebrate my retirement, and I have just learned the news of the appointment of the new Provincial Librarian / Executive Director.

Before I get further into the object of my letter, I would like to congratulate you and thank you for your decisiveness and strong leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may unfortunately continue to unfold for quite a while.

With respect for your leadership role vis-à-vis the COVID-19 pandemic, I have delayed sending this letter. I am hoping that it arrives at a time when you have an opportunity to review the issues raised and take appropriate action to rectify a flawed and damaging process – unsettling and unfair to the people of New Brunswick.

Mr. Premier, I have to tell you that although I am shocked and very disappointed about the decision that was made to appoint a person without the required Master degree in Library and/or Information Studies (MLIS) and library management experience to the position of Provincial Librarian/Executive Director of New Brunswick Public Library Service, I have to say that I am not totally surprised. This may have been in the making for a while. To tell you the truth, when I saw the recruitment ad that was released in November, I feared that something like that would happen.

As a citizen, I have listened to you on numerous occasions through the media. From what I have heard or read you say, my understanding is that you wanted to be the Premier of New Brunswick to ensure that the province would prosper. I also understood that you believe in integrity, as well as fair practices and sound decision making based on **facts**.

So here I am, a retired civil servant. I am now a citizen only, and you are my Premier. Over the years, I heard many times that the Government of New Brunswick wants to be the best employer, as well as to attract and retain the best and the brightest employees.

The New Brunswick public library system and New Brunswick Public Library Service (the Branch of government overseeing it and managing it) have been built and developed during a period of 66 years by generations of qualified professional librarians in senior management roles, as well as qualified and talented staff at all levels.

Mr. Premier, I do not know if anyone tried to convince you (or government) otherwise, but it is a fact that professional librarians are also very good managers. Their track record is there to prove it in New Brunswick.

To me, the extraordinary public library system that we have in place today in New Brunswick is like a cathedral. I compare it to a cathedral because these beautiful buildings that we can see and visit around the world were built by generations of extraordinarily passionate and committed people who shared a common vision and a profound faith in the greater good – something beyond themselves. These constructions also required a lot of skills and know-how. As you know, a person does not become an architect by being given some large sheets of paper and pens to draw. A person does not become a stone mason who can build stone walls by being given a bucket of mortar and some tools. Both require years of learning and apprenticeship.

So why did the government of New Brunswick appoint to the position of Provincial Librarian/Executive Director of New Brunswick Public Library Service a person who does not have the appropriate educational qualifications (Master of Library and/or Information Studies) and the relevant/related years of “library management” experience?

Why did the government do that when there were highly qualified, talented and experienced internal candidates (within New Brunswick Public Library Service) with the Master of Library and/or Information Studies degree and the years of demonstrated library management experience?

Mr. Premier, I do not know if you have been made aware of this, but the recruitment ad that was published by government last Fall did not meet the qualifications and level of experience laid out in the Position Description Questionnaire (PDQ) that was submitted and approved by the Government of New Brunswick - Office of Human Resource’s Classification committee when the position was duly classified at the Pay Band 9 level about 10 years ago. The minimum requirements stated in that official, approved, Position Description Questionnaire document are the following:

“MLIS (Master of Library and/or Information Studies) with 9 years of progressive experience including management and supervision of library operation. Knowledge of large network library system is essential.” (with no equivalency clause)

This Position Description Questionnaire is the key government document that defined this position and determined its right classification at the Pay Band 9 level based on all the responsibilities it involves as well as the high level of academic and specialized library management experience requirements.

From an administrative point of view, once approved, the Position Description Questionnaires are to be used to create job specifications (“specs”), job descriptions and recruitment ads. All these documents work together and are supposed to be aligned. This is how it is supposed to work.

When I announced my retirement in September 2019, to assist with the process I provided the Human Resources Officer working on this file and my Assistant Deputy Minister the recruitment ad from 20 years ago, as well as a copy of the approved Position Description Questionnaire so the recruitment ad could be updated based on this key document.

Mr. Premier, over the past 66 years, the position of Provincial Librarian has always required professional librarian qualifications and extensive experience in the “library management” field. And it was always filled with people with those qualifications.

The recruitment ad that was released in November 2019 stated the following requirements:

“A Master’s degree in Library and/or Information Studies from an ALA accredited programs, with a minimum of (8) years of progressively responsible related work experience, including at least three (3) years of Management experience in a complex operational environment involving responsibility for human and financial resources. A combination of education, training and experience may be considered.”

Although the Master degree of Library and/or Information Studies requirement was stated in the recruitment ad, the following important text from the Position Description Questionnaire was **missing** in that ad: **“with 9 years of progressive experience including management and supervision of library operation. Knowledge of large network library system is essential.”**

And what has been **added** to the recruitment ad is also important: *“with a minimum of (8) years of progressively responsible related work experience, including at least three (3) years of Management experience in a complex operational environment involving responsibility for human and financial resources. A combination of education, training and experience may be considered.”* – which is not coming from the Position Description Questionnaire.

The wording of the recruitment ad is not without consequence **because by removing the “library management” experience component, and adding the broader wording and the equivalency clause, it opened the door to all kinds of interpretations to allow a wide range of equivalencies.** This obviously had a direct impact on the screening process to select the candidates who would be invited to an interview. As a next step, it allowed the appointment of a candidate without a Master of Library and/or Information Studies and the library management experience.

Why? Can someone explain how and why the recruitment ad would stray so far from the qualifications described in the approved Position Description Questionnaire?

Why was the recruitment ad written and approved this way? This had to be intentional. But again why? What was the agenda behind this? Why and how was it approved and released with wording that was not in line with the Position Description Questionnaire.

I believe that the classification of the position would have never been approved at the Pay Band 9 level if the description of the qualifications in the Position Description Questionnaire would not have indicated the absolute necessity of having a Master degree in Library and/or Information Studies as well as 9 years of progressive experience including management and supervision of library operation. – in addition to indicating that knowledge of large network library system is essential”.

When my Assistant Deputy Minister (who was in place last Fall) was appointed to his position about five (5) years ago, one of the first thing he told me in our first phone conversation was that anybody with some management experience could do my job and it did not need to be a professional librarian. I never quite understood why we were having this conversation. Needless to say that I was shocked by his comment. I had never been treated that way in all my previous 15 years as Provincial Librarian

/Executive Director of New Brunswick Public Library Service. Of course, I reacted strongly to his statement and told him that I disagreed. I also explained that I was shocked that the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, a Department dedicated to higher learning and providing financial assistance to New Brunswickers (so they could leave the province to enroll in a Master degree in Library and/or Information Studies, and return eventually to New Brunswick to contribute to our society and our library system) would adhere to the opinion that post-secondary education and specialized degree at the master degree level did not matter and had no value. To be honest with you, I could not believe, at the time, that the strong opinion he expressed represented the position of the Department or of the government. I thought that it was only his personal opinion.

I have to say that during most of my 20 years career as Provincial Librarian/Executive Director of New Brunswick Public Library Service, my qualifications as a professional librarian, my library management experience, as well as my loyal service and expertise were valued and respected by various Assistant Deputy Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Ministers, as well as by my staff, colleagues, and stakeholders across the province.

In those past few years, knowing that my Assistant Deputy Minister was of the opinion that anybody with some management experience could manage anything – including New Brunswick Public Library Service, I kept hoping that the performance and the results delivered by New Brunswick Public Library Service would convince him otherwise. In other words, I thought that **facts** would speak for themselves and would matter.

Mr. Premier, New Brunswick Public Library Service is a very well managed branch of government as demonstrated by its solid track record. I can assure you that I gave it my all for 20 years at the helm of New Brunswick Public Library Service. My management style was one focused on team building, collaboration, consensus building, relationships building across the province, openness, transparency, as well as development and empowerment of others around me. I also deeply believed – and still do – in the mission of public libraries. I never counted my hours. I was loyal to all governments of the day and to our ultimate clients – New Brunswickers and library patrons. I was deeply committed to providing the best service possible to the public in spite of ongoing financial challenges.

I was also determined to make sure that New Brunswick public library system would be leading and not lagging behind the rest of the country. The New Brunswick public library system that I left at the end of 2019 stands strong and proud in the province and in the country. It is a New Brunswick success story as attested by last summer consultation that went around the province, the report published recently by the well-known economist Dr. Herb Emery and his team from the University of New Brunswick Institute for Research, Data and Training, and the Newfoundland and Labrador report prepared for that province a few years ago in which the consultant hired to do the work for a major national consulting firm (a consultant who happened to be a retired New Brunswick Deputy Minister who oversaw New Brunswick Public Library Service in at least two (2) of his departments over the years) recommended that the province of Newfoundland and Labrador may want to consider adopting some sound management practices as well as some structural and strategic elements from New Brunswick Public Library Service.

I am also very proud to say that when I left, solid succession planning was in place – senior professional librarians in senior managing roles were ready (and had the highest competencies) to step in. These are **facts**.

I think I may have been naïve to think that **facts** and New Brunswick Public Library Service achievements over the years would speak for themselves and provide due respect to the generations of professional librarians and library staff who gave it all.

I know for a fact that three (3) senior talented professional librarians who have been working within New Brunswick Public Library Service in senior management roles for many years contacted me to ask me if they could put my name as a reference for them because they were considering applying or had already decided to apply. I responded to each of them that I would be pleased to provide reference for them. I know that at least two (2) of them were interviewed for the position, but I did not receive any call to provide reference for any of them.

Over the past 20 years, I was probably one of the first senior managers within government to actively recruit and repatriate young New Brunswickers as they were graduating with their Master of Library and/or Information Studies from various universities. New Brunswick Public Library Service offered them acting opportunities, work placements, work project, so we could bring them back to New Brunswick as soon as they graduated because my colleagues and I within New Brunswick Public Library Service knew that it was the best way to repatriate and retain professional librarians for the long term. I am very proud to say that these recruits are now at every levels of New Brunswick Public Library Service in positions such as Library Managers and Directors, specialized librarians (such as Reference Librarians, Children's Librarian, Public Service Development Librarians, Indigenous Service Librarian, Head of Units (at the regional and provincial office levels)), Assistant Regional Directors, Regional Directors, as well as in various positions at the provincial office. This ongoing repatriation initiative has been a tremendous success. It provided opportunities to young, talented and qualified professional librarians to come home and begin their career here. I am proud to say that they have contributed tremendously to the development of New Brunswick Public Library Service, providing innovative ideas and staffing stability (because New Brunswickers returning to New Brunswick want be here for the long term) while stimulating sound succession planning (so many talented professional librarians who are ready and eager to step up in various other positions within New Brunswick Public Library Service.

It is important to note that for professional librarians, librarianship is more than a job, it is a profession and a passion. When they join New Brunswick Public Library Service, they do not see this simply as a stepping stone to go into the larger Government of New Brunswick. The fact is that the great majority of them have stayed, thrived and have brought a significant contribution to the development of New Brunswick Public Library Service over the years. New Brunswick Public Library Service has an incredibly positive track record in term of employees' retention – they knew they could grow within the organization. However, the recent government decision regarding the appointment of the new Provincial Librarian/Executive Director of New Brunswick Public Library Service may now cast a doubt on all that. I can only imagine how that decision may have disappointed and demoralized many of them.

New Brunswick Public Library Service was not built overnight. It was built patiently, step by step, stone by stone, by generations of professional librarians who were visionary, hard workers and who became mentors to following generations.

Mr. Premier, it is also essential to recognize that for the Provincial Librarian/Executive Director position, educational qualifications and senior library management experience are also vital to the advocacy role necessary for public library development in changing times. The Provincial Librarian/Executive Director

is a chief advocate for public library services – to the public, to stakeholders, and within government itself.

The appointment of a person who is not a professional librarian and who has no experience in the “business” of developing and managing public libraries and public library systems is **incomprehensible** and **unacceptable** to me. It also sends an incredibly demoralizing and frightening message to anyone working within NBPLS at the moment as well as to the public. Those who are born and bred in New Brunswick as well as those who moved here believing it was worth their time to invest their energy in a career in the New Brunswick public library system and within the Government of New Brunswick may now have doubt about their choice.

When I became Provincial Librarian/Executive Director of New Brunswick Public Library Service 20 years ago, I felt that I was given a great opportunity to work hard for the long term and make a difference with others. In 1997-1998, the government had decided to eliminate the regional library boards, and all of a sudden, all the employees became New Brunswick Public Library Service (Government of New Brunswick) employees instead of being employed by regional boards in the regions. We had an incredible challenge in front of us which was to, together, become a truly provincial organization. Provincial Office and Regional Offices management joined forces through a Provincial Management Team and a structure of various provincial committees involving staff from all regions in specialized services such as children’s services, cataloguing, public services development, statistics reporting, and so on. For example, it took approximately 7 years of teamwork and consensus building just to bring standardization to the classification of libraries and bring equity and consistency to level of responsibilities, salaries and classification of positions across the province – and this was done in a positive collaborative effort. Over these past 20 years, New Brunswick Public Library Service has become the unified provincial organization that elected officials ordered us to create following the review of the *New Brunswick Public Libraries Act*, and the establishment of the New Brunswick Public Libraries Board and the New Brunswick Public Libraries Foundation Board. I am proud to report that we have succeeded. This is a **fact**.

Today, we have a solid, unified, New Brunswick public library system that is well managed by New Brunswick Public Library Service. We have solid sets of provincial policies and guidelines, successful ongoing provincial programs and initiatives, successful partnerships such as those with cultural and patrimonial institutions, a thriving New Brunswick Public Libraries Foundation, a committed New Brunswick Public Libraries Board, and strong strategic and operational planning processes delivering consistently positive results. I could go on and on. New Brunswick Public Library Service and the New Brunswick public library system are truly a provincial treasure. This did not happen by magic. It is the result of an incredible amount of work carried on by hundred and hundred of New Brunswick Public Library Service employees at all levels over the years. And it was all funded by New Brunswickers. The investment of the citizens of New Brunswick into creating that success story must be preserved so it can continue to evolve positively in the future based on **facts** and the ongoing contribution of talented, knowledgeable, committed and passionate qualified staff and management team. Yes, passionate and qualified! This is also a **fact**.

Mr. Premier, it appears to me that the recruitment process for the new Provincial Librarian/Executive Director of New Brunswick Public Library Service was carefully planned and executed, but profoundly flawed. Whoever directed this must have felt quite powerful, untouchable and invincible to think this would go unnoticed and unchallenged.

As the retired Provincial Librarian/Executive Director, I see it as a misguided disrespect to the public and against a profession and generations of professional librarians and library staff who have built New Brunswick Public Library Service. The **facts** I outlined in my letter, and the legacy of generations of library staff who have worked within New Brunswick Public Library Service and professional librarians who managed the public library system to make it what it is today, **have been trampled on.**

I read in the media that a justification for this appointment was the *Corporate Talent Management Program*. This is at the least “**farcical**”. First of all, this program, to my knowledge, was not designed or intended to be used to appoint unqualified candidates to positions. However, I have to point out that I believe that its design opened the door to this type of abuse. Only a small number of government employees are registered in this program and it does not include all very talented Government of New Brunswick (including New Brunswick Public Library Service) employees. Secondly, nowhere in the recruitment ad was it indicated that candidates enrolled in this program (even if they were unqualified) would be given priority – **fairness and transparency should have required at least such a statement.**

As a citizen, this appointment gives me grave concerns that this might be the new way that the government is going to fill positions anywhere in government in the future: by manipulating the recruitment ads (beyond their officially approved requirements) to “**tailoring**” them in order to facilitate particular agendas, political appointments, favoritism, friendships, and what else...

Mr. Premier, I understand from media reports that the candidate appointed to the position of Provincial Librarian/Executive Director of New Brunswick Public Library Service does not even have the basic qualifications to be considered for a Library Manager position of a small library at a Pay Band 2 level – because these positions require at least a bachelor’s degree.

I believe the competition process was seriously flawed from the beginning in unacceptable ways for a fair, transparent, and exemplary government and civil service.

I also believe it would be important for government to review every step of the process that took place: the writing and approval of the recruitment ad, the screening of candidates, the interviews, the composition of the panel that conducted the interviews, the use of the Corporate Talent Management Program, the linguistic assessment, as well as the appointment itself.

I believe that my Assistant Deputy Minister was on the interview panel because he told me he would be. I also believe that the Human Resources Officer responsible for the competition would have been on the panel (it is a normal procedure). And then, there is always a 3rd person to ensure balance. I assumed that perhaps the Deputy Minister might also be on the panel. In positions at that level, it is my understanding that it would usually involve, in addition to the direct supervisor and a Human Resources Officer, another high-level civil servant such as another Assistant Deputy Minister or a Deputy Minister – this is how it was done when I was interviewed for the position 20 years ago.

Mr. Premier, I am sure that you could quickly identify the composition of the panel. Another important point is that there should never be a conflict of interest on an interview panel in relation to any candidate. Those are the simple rules I have been taught in my 20 years of involvement with recruitment working with Human Resources Services within Government of New Brunswick.

Mr. Premier, I believe that you have the duty to ensure that a comprehensive, in-depth and independent review of the entire recruitment process that took place to appoint the new Provincial Librarian/Executive Director of New Brunswick Public Library Service is carried on. Only such a review would allow you to have all the **facts** in hands. And only such a review could reassure the people of New Brunswick. Needless to say, this review should not be conducted by the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour to avoid any perception of conflict of interest.

Mr. Premier, I believe that it was my duty to write this letter in order to alert you and give you the opportunity to correct this **unfair, unjustifiable and incomprehensible decision**. I trust that you will act with integrity when you have all the **facts**.

If you happen to discover that due processes were not followed or that there were flaws, the government has the **power and duty** to cancel the competition (even after a few months), rescind the appointment and begin a new process in whole or in part. I believe this type of actions has been done in the past.

Mr. Higgs, you are our Premier. This happened under your watch. I sincerely hope that you will look into this with all the seriousness it deserves. New Brunswick citizens and civil servants deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

Sylvie Nadeau

Printed signed letter sent by mail to the Premier

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David Coon, Leader of the Green Party of NB
Kevin Vickers, Leader of the Liberal Party of NB

Kris Austin, Leader of the People Alliance Party of NB
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