

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



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February 28, 2018

Honourable Carole James
Finance Minister and Deputy Premier

Honourable Scott Fraser
Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation

Re: Support for funding for Indigenous languages of British Columbia

Dear Ministers James and Fraser,

In my capacity as Acting Head of the Department of Linguistics at the University of British Columbia, I would like to register my department's strong and unequivocal support for the funding initiative announced in the recent provincial budget, aimed at stabilizing and revitalizing the Indigenous languages of British Columbia.

Many of us work directly with First Nations communities in their ongoing struggles to preserve and revive their languages, spoken here for many thousands of years and now all gravely endangered. Aside from representing the most important intangible cultural heritage of our province, we also know both from academic studies and our own experiences that these languages are integral to the well-being of the communities where they are traditionally spoken.

Like many other citizens of BC, we are also dismayed at the ill-informed and insensitive comments made in response to the Indigenous languages funding initiative by Mike Morris, Liberal MLA for Prince George-Mackenzie. Mr. Morris fails to make a basic connection between the health of a language, a speech community, and its members, a connection which has been driven home time and time again in the disastrous aftermath of the residential school era. Far from taking money away from attempts to curb social problems in First Nations communities, the BC language initiative will almost certainly help to alleviate them.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Yours sincerely,

Lisa Matthewson

Lisa Matthewson.
(Professor and Distinguished University Scholar, Acting Head of Linguistics)

cc: Gage Averill, Dean of Arts, UBC
John Horgan, Premier of British Columbia
Sheryl Lightfoot, Acting Chair, First Nations and Indigenous Studies, Canada Research Chair
in Global Indigenous Rights and Politics
Mike Morris, MLA, Prince George-Mackenzie
Santa J. Ono, President, UBC
Philip Steenkamp, Vice-President, External Relations, UBC
Mark Turin, Chair, First Nations and Endangered Languages Program, UBC