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News Release

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B.C. Information and Privacy Commissioner calls on the B.C. government to fix 10-year archiving impasse and modernize records management

VICTORIA — In a special report released today, Information and Privacy Commissioner Elizabeth Denham is calling on the B.C. government to resolve an archiving impasse that has left tens of thousands of boxes of government records languishing in warehouses.

“Public archives serve as the corporate memory of societies, nations, provinces and institutions, but they are also important for government accountability and transparency. Without an accessible archive of government records, citizens, journalists and historians are hampered in accessing records of our government’s actions and deliberations,” said Commissioner Denham.

“For the past 10 years, there has been a failure to archive government records in B.C. 33,000 boxes of government records earmarked for permanent preservation sit in off-site storage. This situation cannot continue without significant financial and historical consequences.”

In 2003, when the BC Archives became a part of the Royal BC Museum, a ‘charge back’ system was established for the archiving of government records. Ministries seeking to deposit records of long-term value with the BC Archives were to be charged \$454 per box. As a result of this fee, no government records scheduled for transfer have been deposited in the archives in the past decade.

The Commissioner’s report recommends that government provide funding to address this backlog and bring archives back into core government. Government should also provide adequate resources going forward to ensure archiving continues, including an investment in infrastructure to support the archiving of electronic records.

A second major issue is that the BC Archives has no capability to archive digital records. “As more and more records are ‘born digital,’ government needs a strategy to preserve and archive these records. The archiving of electronic records requires a new approach that ensures records can be accessed as technologies evolve. I recommend that government invest in creating a system for storing and archiving electronic records in light of the unique needs of this media,” said Denham.

Finally, the Commissioner's report recommends modernizing the current legislative framework.

"The *Document Disposal Act* was designed in 1936 and is not capable of addressing 21st-century records management. British Columbia needs a modern legislative framework that addresses the full life-cycle of a record, from creation, use through to final disposition or archiving. Such a framework would revitalize and modernize records management in government and provide the historical legacy British Columbians deserve," said Denham.

A Failure to Archive: Recommendations to Modernize Government Records Management is available for download at: www.oipc.bc.ca/report/special-reports

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