



AETS
**Anishinabek Employment
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

AETS and its nine-member First Nations express severe disappointment at the decisions and actions of Thunder Bay Public Library.

Thunder Bay, ON: (May 13, 2025) - Anishinabek Employment and Training Services (AETS) is expressing deep disappointment in the actions and decisions of Thunder Bay Public Library (TBPL) following the termination of their long-standing community partnership. The unexpected move has left the First Nation Communities in shock and uncertain about the future of their relationship with the TBPL leadership.

In 2018, AETS and TBPL forged a long-term partnership grounded in a shared commitment to advancing Reconciliation efforts in the city. Over the years, AETS has invested more than \$1 million into enhancing the Waverley and Brodie libraries of which a majority will remain, transforming them into more inclusive and welcoming spaces for all. These improvements included, but were not exclusive to, the addition of barrier-free and gender-neutral Washrooms, Boardroom, Kitchen, Elders in Residence Space, Electrical upgrades, and new Ventilation systems to accommodate cultural smudging.

Despite these significant investments and the success of their collaboration, AETS was recently-informed in November 2024 that they must vacate both library facilities initially within three months, a decision communicated by legal counsel representing TBPL. The TBPL subsequently slightly adjusted the must-vacate date to the end of May 2025 in an attempt to mitigate challenges around termination of the tenancy, despite those challenges being more than \$1 million of investment into the TBPL properties by AETS and an additional \$100,000 plus for the transition into a new location.





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Says Sharon Ostberg, AETS Board Director: *“The AETS Board, management, and the nine First Nations we represent are deeply offended by the actions and conduct of Thunder Bay Public Library. We believe the Library Board and management have not been genuine in their communications with us. We’ve been subjected to a disrespectful lease termination process that undermines the cooperation and trust we have worked so hard to build over the years. This partnership was a cornerstone for Reconciliation in Thunder Bay, and we expected a much more thoughtful and respectful approach from what we considered our community partners.”*

The agreement between AETS and TBPL was based on a potential first right-of-refusal lease, lasting at least until March 31, 2029, with additional potential ownership opportunities in the Waverley Library building. In 2023, AETS entered good-faith discussions with TBPL, aiming to renew the lease according to the terms outlined in the agreement. However, after receiving the unexpected termination notice in November 2024, AETS began transition negotiations and was informed that a financial offer would be made to recognize the organization’s investments in the library buildings.

Sharon Ostberg continues: *“Thunder Bay Public Library repeatedly delayed meaningful lease renewal discussions with our Board for over a year and has continued to stall transition negotiations for the past several months. On March 26, 2025, AETS was informed by the library’s representatives that no financial offer would be made. As First Nations, we feel misled by both the City of Thunder Bay and Thunder Bay Public Library. This has caused significant disruptions to our operations, financial losses, and, most importantly, irreparable damage to the relationship between First Nations and the TBPL as well as the City of Thunder Bay.”*





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In response to these developments, a Chief and Board of Directors from one of the AETS First Nation Communities have followed up with the Mayor of Thunder Bay, which all eight other AETS Chiefs are aware of, hoping to find a resolution that will allow the community partnership to end on more positive terms.

AETS is a not-for-profit organization and part of a national network delivering Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET), representing nine member First Nations in the North Superior Region. The organization remains dedicated to its mission of providing culturally respectful education and training to employment pathways for First Nation Citizens.

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