

Dear Members of the Law Amendments Committee:

I am writing to request that you withdraw Bill 100 immediately. I am a graduate of Acadia University and Dalhousie University and I am currently employed as an archivist at Dalhousie University, where I am a member of the Dalhousie Faculty Association. The following letter reflects my personal opinions regarding Bill 100.

This bill is flawed in many ways. In the first place, it does absolutely nothing to address the issue of tuition fees, which remains the largest problem facing Nova Scotia's post-secondary education system. We have the highest fees in the country! It is irresponsible to assume that international students and graduate students will continue to come to Nova Scotia if there is no plan to control fees. The bill is a way of legitimizing the chronic underfunding of Nova Scotia's universities, some of which are facing financial issues that are directly related to the government's underfunding and avoidance of the tuition fee problem.

Like other pieces of legislation proposed by this government, the bill is a thinly-veiled assault on collective bargaining rights and other rights of workers. The right to strike is constitutionally protected and there is no imaginable case to be made that university workers are "essential services." The bill has no provisions to ensure accountability of senior administrators and provincial bureaucrats who are ultimately responsible for the financial stability of our post-secondary education institutions.

The bill also undermines academic and intellectual freedom of employees and students. A quick scan of course offerings is all you need to see that universities already offer extensive learning opportunities that are directly relevant to Nova Scotia. I understand that the Labour and Advanced Education Minister has already proposed some amendments to fix some of the most egregious aspects of the bill. But Section 8 still allows the government to force universities to ensure their teaching and research activities "align" with the province's social and economic priorities. The language around academic freedom is still too weak. The government cannot expect to have a reasonable and informed dialogue about a university's "revitalization plan" when the process curtails academic freedom and so many constitutionally protected rights. I also share Maureen MacDonald's concerns that these amendments were introduced just as people started making appearances before the Law Amendments Committee. You should not "rush" through this important legislative process in this manner.

The Ivany report found that Nova Scotia's post-secondary education system was one of the province's strongest assets and a key component to our ability to attract international investment. Research in Nova Scotia's universities accounts for the vast majority of the province's external research and development funding. An open and global view on research and development is vital for continued success in this area. This view does not at all preclude emphasis on local issues; in fact, many faculty members at Nova Scotia universities regularly conduct research that engages with high priority social and economic issues. Furthermore, universities are already required to develop strategic research plans to qualify for federal research funding. These plans clearly address the same social and economic issues facing this province, as well as other areas where Nova Scotia faculty are among the most qualified experts in the world.

This government has established a dangerous pattern of implementing dramatic and sweeping changes

to some of the province's most important industries without consultation and without readily available evidence. Bill 100 demonstrates that the government sees our universities as a liability that must be addressed by attacking workers and making vain attempts to direct the knowledge economy.

The post-secondary system in Nova Scotia is robust but there are many inefficiencies that could be resolved. It was disappointing, for example, to see that there was no support to develop a shared storage facility for library and archival collections. Extensive work went into the feasibility study and the idea was widely supported among my colleagues in the province's libraries and archives, but funding was not provided to build the facility. Now each university is left incurring the same costs to store and preserve their collections. I would support legislation that establishes shared services of this nature that would help cut costs and foster collaboration without attacking workers.

As a young faculty member hoping to raise my family in Nova Scotia and spend my career working at Dalhousie University, I am very much in favour of improving the post-secondary education system in this province. But the government's austerity philosophy attacks the very people for whom it claims to be working. We need to retain young people and creative people and intelligent people and we need to support the ability of our universities to attract research funding and the best students we can recruit. Quite simply, this bill will inhibit my own ability to help students, to help work towards a sustainable and innovative post-secondary education system in Nova Scotia, and to generally help make this province a better place to live, work, and pay taxes.

I apologize for the lengthy letter, but I hope these points will help make it clear that Bill 100 must be withdrawn and replaced with an open and honest dialogue about the future of Nova Scotia's post-secondary education system. Let's start with a provincial commission focused on the sustainability and growth of our universities.

I have already sent a copy of this letter to Honourable Stephen McNeil, Diana Whalen, and Kelly Regan, and I have written another letter to my MLA.

Respectfully,

Creighton Barrett

Halifax, Nova Scotia

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