



## Notes for a Submission

By

Joan Jessome

President

Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union

To the  
Law Amendments Committee  
On  
Bill 134 -  
Liquor Control Act (amended)

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## **Introduction**

Thank you, Madam Chairperson and members of the Committee for this opportunity to speak to you about Bill 134 – *Liquor Control Act (amended)*. Our President Joan Jessome is unable to be here today. We are here speak on her behalf about this Bill. I am Nicole McKim and I work as an Employee Relations Officer with the Union for which part of my responsibility is to assist our members who work in liquor stores, the warehouse, and the head office of the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation. I also worked as a liquor store clerk for ten years prior to my coming to work with NSGEU. With me is Ian Johnson, who is a Servicing Coordinator and Policy Analyst with the Union.

The Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU) is the largest union in the province representing approximately 31,000 workers across the public sector in the provincial government, corrections, health care, public schools, community colleges, universities, municipalities, and community organizations. Of particular interest for this Bill is that we are privileged to represent approximately 1200 employees of the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation in the liquor stores, the warehouse, the head office, as well as the managers and assistant managers of the stores.

In general, I want to clearly indicate that we are strongly opposed to this Bill in its present form.

There seem to be two main aspects to Bill 134:

- Changing or opening up where sales of alcoholic products can take place
- Allowing these changes to be decided by regulation without having to bring forward legislative initiatives and face the scrutiny of open public debate and accountability.

We are very concerned about any piece of legislation that gives new broad regulatory powers to the Cabinet, but especially so, when these new powers

would apply to the sale of alcoholic products. We understand all the current buzzwords about cutting red tape, modernizing legislation, and creating regulatory excellence. But we do not agree that government should get out of the way of business, or abdicate its principal responsibility of serving the public interest and helping to improve the lives of all Nova Scotians, not just the business community. Government does not exist solely to advance the interests of business. We do not believe that business alone drives our economy forward. All citizens, communities and sectors can help make a difference including the public sector and public sector employees.

The consequences of increased access to alcoholic products are well known. There are significant health, legal, social, and yes, even economic costs to allowing increased access without adequate controls and protections. This Bill may only specifically apply to the Nova Scotia liquor manufacturing industry, but it is quite clear that the intent of the government is to move much further beyond that one set of changes, supposedly to help make businesses more competitive. It could well mean sales of wine and beer in corner stores, and still more agency stores, as well as allowing alcoholic products to be sold by hotels and by restaurants away from their premises, opening up some private liquor stores, and ultimately, privatizing or contracting out parts or all of the NSLC.

One of important strengths of the current NSLC structure and operations is a significant commitment to social responsibility, especially by our members who work in the 103 stores across the province. They are highly trained to ensure the responsible use of alcoholic products. You cannot assume that allowing more outlets to sell alcoholic products will have little impact on public safety or on the costs to individuals, families and their communities. The Minister talked in Second Reading about balancing public access and public safety, but there is little in this Bill or in the comments of the Minister to show how that balance will be achieved.

We are also very concerned about how this Bill will allow future changes to the sale of liquor products to be decided behind closed doors by the Cabinet when they should be decided openly and broadly through extensive public debate and discussion. Bill 134 is yet another attack by this government against the democratic rights of Nova Scotians, in addition to its unceasing attacks on collective bargaining rights and on the right of workers to organize and to choose their own union. There will be even less openness or accountability if this Bill is passed in its present form.

The Minister said the government has been consulting extensively with Nova Scotia liquor manufacturers about the changes reflected in this Bill. But he or they did not consult at all with us who are involved extensively in this industry. We only heard about this Bill in the media a few days ago. Nor did we see any effort to reach out to municipalities, health organizations, community groups, or Nova Scotians as a whole. A much more extensive consultation process must be undertaken.

Bill 134 is also represents a major reversal of a written commitment of the then Liberal Opposition. During the 2013 election, then Opposition Leader Stephen McNeil committed: "A Liberal government will not privatize or sell off the NSLC, nor will we change the manner in which alcohol is regulated in Nova Scotia". This Bill will drastically change the way alcohol is regulated as well as how such decisions are being made. In our view, this change by the government is completely unacceptable.

For all these reasons, the NSGEU believes that Bill 134 should be set aside until all Nova Scotians are fully and extensively consulted on the types of changes being contemplated by this Bill. We also believe there should be a health and public safety impact assessment of what the types of changes which the government is considering, will mean for individuals, families and communities. The Bill should not go forward in its present form.

We thank the Committee for this opportunity to speak with you, and we welcome any questions and comments.