

December 15, 2015

To whom it may concern

We are writing this letter to express our objections to the Nova Scotia Government's motion to pass Bill 148. We believe that this is bargaining in bad faith. The Nova Scotia Government Employee's Union has made every effort to have open negotiations and has offered concessions to assist the Government in its efforts to manage its finances. In return, the Government has offered little and has made threats to the Civil Service and the Nova Scotia Government Employee's Union in an effort to intimidate a settlement.

At no time did the Government make an effort to have meaningful negotiations with the Unions. There was no discussion on what concessions could be made by both parties in this matter. The Government's position was strictly to state that it would define the terms of the contract and demand that the Unions make all of the concessions. This is not negotiation and this is not democracy.

As the Government is proposing Bill C148, the Nova Scotia Government Employee's Union has been meeting to discuss the offer made by Government. Instead of allowing the process to proceed through a democratic process, the Government has chosen to resort to legislation to force a settlement. We believe this is an unconstitutional action.

Furthermore, we note that the Government has chosen to take this action in an underhanded manner. The debate in the Legislature occurred at night, without notice to the public. The Law Amendments Committee is hearing submissions from the public during an ice storm, when it is unsafe for those who wish to make submissions to the Committee to travel. Though the Government can claim that it allowed the public to make submissions, in reality it used a storm to dismiss the opinions of those who wish to respond to this legislation.

We believe that the action of the Government is contrary to the democracy that Canadians stand for. The process that the Nova Scotia Government has taken to force this process on the civil service unions is shameful.

Though the Government may pass legislation that will force a new contract on its employees, it will do nothing to make the workings of government run smoothly. Already, the morale in government service is poor. In our office, we have been working at fifty percent staffing levels or less for the past several months. In addition to this level of staffing, we have also been expected to cover another district where the only employee assigned there has also been on a long term illness. As a result, we are managing not only our area of responsibility (four counties) but another county as well. We are spread too thin to be able to provide the citizens of Nova Scotia with the quality and timely services that they deserve. Contrary to what some may believe, we in the Civil Service take pride in our work and want to provide the best services to Nova Scotians that we can. The Government's practices of not replacing staff, especially in critical programs does not support this desire.

These are not concerns that are limited to our office. Our colleagues in other offices and agencies are having similar concerns. We and many other civil servants have worked many hours of overtime to ensure that those that we serve receive the services that they need. In most of these cases, we have either not submitted for the overtime, or the request for the overtime compensation, as defined in the Collective Agreement in denied.

Even more offensive is the tactics of the Government of fueling a resentment of the public against the civil servants. The professionals employed by the Province of Nova Scotia provide so many essential services to the citizens of Nova Scotia. These services include providing assistance and protection to vulnerable populations (i.e. children, the disabled, the elder), maintain highways and other infrastructure, provide health care in both the community and the hospital, provide security in Courts and correctional centers, to name only a few. Many of these jobs are without equal in the private sector and many of the professionals have many years of education and experience to provide these services. Employees such as nurses, engineers, social workers, are licensed professionals.

One issue to point out is that in the private sector, if you have to utilize the services of a licensed professional, one expects to pay a significant amount for those services because of the amount of education and responsibility that those professionals assume. Think of such professionals as lawyers, engineers, plumbers, electricians, etc. when we retain these professionals in the private sector, the cost of their services is what it is, regardless of the state of our bank account. Though professionals in the civil service do not expect to make as much as their private sector counterparts, they still should be paid a wage that is reasonable within the market.

The Government has allowed some members of the public to believe that civil servants are overpaid and do little work. In reality, many civil servants do not make large salaries and struggle as much as those who are underpaid in the private sector. We are offended that the Government has used tis opportunity to reinforce this stereotype instead of showing the public what the civil service does for Nova Scotians. Furthermore, the Government has chosen to reinforce this stereotype by its disrespectful treatment of its civil servants. Where those in the private sector have complained about benefits that government employees may receive, the government has not advocated to those employers to improve the benefits and pension plans that they too deserve.

It is our belief that there will be a fall out from the passing of Bill 148. The cost of living will continue to increase over the term of the contract. Our salary will only go so far. When this happens, we will spend less money. This will affect the businesses within our communities. We will have less income to shop in stores, go to restaurants, and see a show. As a result, the businesses in our community will also feel the effects of this legislation.

It should also be noted that with the poor morale within the Civil Service, it is becoming harder to attract young workers coming out of colleges and universities to work in Nova Scotia. As we have seen in the past, Atlantic Canadians have been travelling to other parts of Canada to seek employment. Once they leave the province, it is hard to get them to return.

Given these concerns, we ask that the Legislature reconsider its plan to pass this Legislation.

Thank-you for your consideration of these concerns.

Sincerely,

Stephen Boyd

Karen Ramsay

Marie Williams