

Dear Members of the Law Amendments Committee,
Thank you for the opportunity to present concerning Bill 75. By way of introduction, my name is Paul Wozney. I am a father of three children attending public schools in the Halifax Regional School Board, a teacher at Charles P. Allen High School in Bedford, the Vice President for Communications with the Halifax County Local of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union.

I am here to protest the imminent, permanent impacts on Nova Scotia's schools if Bill 75 is passed into law.

Other speakers to the law amendments committee have provided insight as to how this Bill will create a second class of citizens in Nova Scotia, of teachers and other public sector workers, through the decimation of their collective bargaining rights afforded by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I would like to discuss how the passage of Bill 75 into law also represents an egregious continuation of the neglect of another essential charter freedom in our province over the past three decades: the right to a quality, public education.

I would like to remind this committee that per capita spending on education in Nova Scotia once empowered our schools to offer rich and varied programming and meet a wide range of needs. Prior to the government of John Savage, public schools in Nova Scotia were amongst the finest in Canada and were jewels that not only reflected the actual commitment of government to the fundamental rights of our children and youth, but investment in our communities that transformed fortunes and opportunities.

However, in 1993 a series of budgets hacked hundreds of millions in funding from public education. Moves like amalgamating school boards were initiated in the name of fiscal responsibility, and "fat" such as music, phys ed, fine arts, vocational education and other world class programming were nixed to initiate a focus on STEM subject areas.

The fact is that funding for public education in Nova Scotia was once amongst the best in Canada. Now, our province annually contends for the title of the most poorly funded public education system on a per capita basis, such that Nova Scotia's contemporaries in that regard include some of the most impoverished states in the USA.

To date, the Liberal Government's commitment to funding has involved pushing money around on a ledger page. Numbers like 170 million and 65 million bandied about in press releases sound impressive, but have resulted in the net loss of over 400 full time teaching positions since it took office. EPA positions in Nova Scotia continue to fall in number under Liberal rule as school boards are forced to reallocate funding to compensate for cuts in this area. At this moment, class sizes, backlogs in access psychoeducational testing and caseload sizes for speech language pathologist, English as an Additional Language, severe learning disability teachers, Autism specialist and many other one to one interventions have ballooned to crisis levels with no end in sight on the horizon.

It strains all reason to understand how this government can justify Bill 75 as an immediate and sustained solution to any of the issues thousands of students, parents and teachers have taken unprecedented action to bring to the attention of the McNeil Liberals.

Bill 75 includes ZERO dollars in the first two years of the imposed settlement to procure additional supports needed to address learning and teaching conditions this government openly acknowledges are complex and profound. The \$20 million over the last two years that can only be spent with Minister Casey's personal approval breaks down to \$85 in new spending for each student in Nova Scotia per year. If \$85 won't pay for the cost of one week of after school care via the Excel program at my neighbourhood school, how can citizens of this province expect it to result in immediate, vital changes that will buoy our most needy, at risk students? How any government believes that public schools drowning in legitimate,

overwhelming needs can be improved on a systemic level by funding that can only be dispersed in \$250,000 increments is truly baffling.

In fairness, the blame for the politically convenient neglect of our public schools rightly rests on the shoulders of all three parties in the legislature. Each has governed at some point over the past three decades and failed to bring Nova Scotia into parity with other provinces where classroom condition articles are included in collective agreements. Their very absence is one of the key reasons our public schools lag behind their counterparts in provinces where these measures are longstanding, valued features of collective agreements that hold both teachers unions and the government accountable as key stakeholders in providing their citizens with one of our sacrosanct Canadian freedoms: a quality public education.

However, it is Stephen McNeil and his majority government that hold the power today to take the first steps towards reversing the neglect of public schools that has diminished the education for more than a generation of our students. Despite your party's agenda, this is a defining moment in each of your careers in public office: serve the interests of your party, or make the difficult but necessary choice to fight for those who have no vote or voice: our children and youth.

There is only one place that affords the government, the public it represents and representation for public school teachers to do the difficult but critical work of forging a collective agreement that has the teeth and resources to make a difference, today, for our students: the bargaining table. In the strongest terms possible, I urge you all to defeat Bill 75 and support a return to free and fair collective bargaining that entrenches meaningful articles that will improve classroom conditions in a collective agreement and ensures a high quality public education for all students in Nova Scotia. With a conciliation board, mediation and arbitration untouched over the past two years, it is plain that several steps remain at your shared disposal to mend the broken trust, forge a new partnership and craft an agreement all stakeholders can stand proudly behind to help our public schools thrive again.

I thank you for your consideration, and look forward to your questions.