
From: julia mcinnes [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, February 15, 2017 10:06 PM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: FOR THE LAW AMMENDMENTS COMMITTEE: My response to Bill 75

My name is Julia McInnes. I have worked as a School Psychologist for the Halifax Regional School Board for the past 26 years. My work as a School Psychologist is occupied on a daily basis with the stresses faced by teachers, by students, and by their parents. In recent years, I have come to the conclusion that our education system is broken. The increased stresses faced by teachers and students are directly related to the seemingly endless flow of new initiatives imposed on our school boards by the Department of Education, whether in the form of technology (i.e., Power School) or mandated changes to the curriculum. Change can obviously be a positive thing, but in the absence of the necessary supports to accommodate the changes, teachers are left with increasingly unmanageable duties that take away from their ability to teach. The complexity of student needs in our inclusive classrooms remains inadequately supported by the necessary human resources that are required to ensure successful learning for all students. Much of my work in the school system revolves around helping to identify the specific nature of students' challenges, and then, in consultation with School and Program Planning Teams, making recommendations about how individual student needs can be met. These needs include learning, social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. The first part of this task - identifying student needs - is the relatively easy part. The second part of this task - putting in place the supports that are required in order for students to be successful - has become almost impossible and incredibly frustrating and discouraging. Classroom teachers and other school support staff are simply "maxed out" in their efforts to address the enormous challenges they face in providing the best possible education for all students. The result is that the education of all our students suffers and teachers are increasingly stressed and overwhelmed.

Bill 75 does nothing to address what is needed to begin to repair our broken education system. Creating committees to study problems that are already well understood by our educators is a waste of time and taxpayer dollars. The optics of this approach - we're not going to fix the problems, but we're willing to take a "look" at them - is completely transparent and absolutely disheartening. If the government is as committed to improving our education system as it says it is, the money earmarked for committees would be redirected towards concrete and immediate solutions in the form of additional supports for students in our classrooms today - more Resource and Learning Center teachers to support students who have program adaptations and Individual Program Plans, more classroom teachers to alleviate problems with class size and composition, and more Educational Program Assistants to assist teachers in supporting Special Needs students. If any of the tentative agreements that were proposed to teachers had incorporated these types of concrete and immediate solutions to what can only be characterized as an absolute crisis in our education system, more teacher support for a tentative agreement likely would have followed. Teachers are upset and are voting No because the Liberal government has been unwilling to make any real commitments to fix our broken system.

My final comments are about the horrendous political process that has unfolded since Mr. McNeil first proposed over the weekend that Bill 75 would be tabled. I attended the NSTU rally on Wednesday evening - February 15th - and was there outside Province House when it was announced that every single Liberal MLA voted in favor of Bill 75 this evening. How can that be? Understandably, there are likely different levels of understanding about the exact nature of our currently under-funded and

broken education system. What is clear to me, however, from this unanimous Liberal support for Bill 75, is that the Liberal MLAs' collective votes were more about political self-interest and the fiscal plan of the McNeil government than about improving the education system in this province. I am ashamed to have ever voted for a Liberal candidate. You have all let us down.

The Liberal Government, under Stephen McNeil, stands in a unique position to facilitate a more positive future for our education system and for the lives of all students and their families. I implore you to take these comments and concerns into consideration before you choose how to vote next time.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my concerns.

Respectfully submitted,
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Halifax Regional School Board