
From: Becca Barker [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, February 15, 2017 7:01 PM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: Submission for Law Amendments Committee on Bill 75

Dear Law Amendments Committee:

Please accept this letter as my written submission to speak to Bill 75.

I cannot fathom why, after fifteen months of collective bargaining, the provincial government suddenly thinks that imposing a contract on our beleaguered teachers and establishing committees to discuss classroom issues will solve the problems teachers and students face in our schools. It is insulting to suggest that making new committees, who are lacking in authority to do anything but make recommendations that can be easily ignored, are a sign that our government is listening to teachers. If these committees are expected to make recommendations in time for the start of the school year in September, will there be sufficient funding set aside in the upcoming budget to pay for what's needed? Or will these committees only be able to determine partial solutions based on some random amount determined in the spring budget?

I have heard Premier McNeil repeat over and over again that he negotiated three contracts, he wants schools to return to "normal," and that Nova Scotia cannot afford to invest our tax money into education in a manner that the teachers assert would be most helpful. But a return to "normal" is NOT what teachers, parents, or students want. As Bruce Cockburn famously sang, "the trouble with normal is it always gets worse." In our education system as it is, "normal" means inclusion happens in a way does not give students with special needs a fair opportunity to learn with their peers. "Normal" means my child's teacher spends hours performing data entry and clerical duties when she could be tackling how to best differentiate her lessons to address the diverse needs of the students. "Normal" means my child's school is under-resourced to the point that I am constantly hustling my neighbours and friends to buy oranges, Christmas wreaths, coffee, and t-shirts just to pay for the school to keep its lights on. "Normal" is nothing I want to go back to. "Normal" is insufficient. "Normal" ignores those most vulnerable in society. And we go back to "normal" at our own peril.

Our government insists that they cannot afford to offer the teachers' union anything more than what's already been offered. Yet this is the same government that is apparently willing to spend a great deal of my tax money on a losing side of a constitutional challenge they will no doubt be facing now. Would I rather invest my tax money propping up a government to survive undesirable political heat? Or would I prefer it be spent on supports that ensure my child doesn't slip through the cracks of a broken system?

The government must go back to the negotiating table, honour the collective bargaining process or turn to binding arbitration in the case of an impasse. To use legislation for political expediency is disingenuous and puts the ruling party's own political aspirations ahead of my child's education. If our government can allow themselves to see the long-term benefits of negotiating, then it'll be short-term pain for long-term gain for all of us. If they insist on continuing to think short-term and prioritize their own political careers, then we all lose in the long term.

Please do NOT legislate my child's teacher's contract. Please honour her rights and return to the bargaining table. It is the right thing to do.

Respectfully,

Becca Barker
parent and tax-payer
Halifax