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**From:** Laura Emily [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, February 16, 2017 12:28 PM  
**To:** Office of the Legislative Counsel  
**Subject:** Bill 75

My name is Laura McRae.

I am in my third year of teaching in Nova Scotia. I am exhausted. I have been overburdened with behaviour problems, with struggling students, and disengaged families. I have essentially lived in my admin's office seeking support, only to be asked to come back at a later time, to seek help elsewhere, or to manage problems on my own, because they themselves have so much on their plates and not enough support within the school.

While logically I know that the main reason that my students are not reaching their full potential is not because I am a bad teacher, but rather that they don't have the necessary supports in place to help them achieve their greatest selves, I still feel like I am failing them.

I have also struggled with anxiety since childhood. I remember my first panic attack like it was yesterday. It hadn't happened in quite a while, actually, when I started teaching. I was hopeful, optimistic, and determined to do some good. I went to work happy every morning, excited about the lesson plan I had prepared the night before for my classroom full of diverse learners. I was hopeful that my students would continue to learn and grow.

But then reality hit, and my hopes changed. I went to school every morning not hoping for learning to happen, not hoping for a fun and enthusiastic classroom environment... I went in, hoping to get by.

I hoped that little \*Stephanie would finally engage instead of sitting on the floor crying. I hoped that \*Justin would choose to complete his classwork that day, instead of throwing a fit, and eventually pencils, scissors, chairs, or desks, because he didn't want to complete the classwork. I really hated evacuating the classroom, stealing precious learning time from the other kids, but sometimes I had no choice, since there was no one to come help me manage the crisis. I hoped that I had used a large enough print on the assignment pages for \*Kyle, since he was legally blind and we were still waiting on classroom supports (in February). I hoped \*Fred would come out of under his desk to listen, and that \*Ginny had eaten enough at breakfast in order to focus through at least the first 30 minutes of school so that she could learn a new letter blend and try to apply it to her writing piece. I hoped that \*Dora had some understanding of what was being taught, as she was so far behind in language learning that she couldn't form a complete sentence without reverting back to her first language half-way through. I hoped that \*Craig wouldn't yell at me all morning because he wanted my attention. I prayed that my reward systems would be easier to manage for one day, that I could keep up with them all for just one day.

I left each school day defeated, unsure that I had managed to teach anything to the little souls who were entrusted to me. Every. Single.

Day. I got home and felt my anxiety creeping in, taking hold of who I was. Every night trying to sleep, I wondered if \*Stephanie was safe at home, if \*Ginny had a nutritious supper, and if \*Dora had a chance to work on her reading. I didn't sleep. For hours, I would lie awake thinking about all the things I could have done differently in order to be a better teacher; in order to better prepare my students for the next grade level (even if they weren't ready for it). I was upset at my own teaching, but I shouldn't have been. I should have been upset with the system, with the lack of support my students and I had in school. I had NO in-class support, and one of the most difficult classes in the school.

Instead of realising there were systemic issues, I found issues in myself - and my mental health suffered because of it. Imagine how many teachers are trying to be hopeful every day, only to be defeated every day - how many are suffering in silence? How many teachers have been on stress leave, not because of family issues, but because of classroom

conditions? Of being so overwhelmed with failure that they couldn't take it anymore? Teacher burnout doesn't happen when teachers are supported and students can succeed - burnout happens when too much pressure is put on one individual, who stands alone in a sea of expectations and outcomes that will never be met, regardless of how much free time and labour are given to try to meet them.

Imagine going to work every day, trying to be hopeful, trying to accomplish something, only to be disheartened and discouraged at every turn. Now close your eyes and imagine this:

You're a newspaper editor, or a publisher, or a government office worker... You start your day with an assignment you've been working on for months. You're reading over a document for your boss, coffee in hand, ready to make changes and improve the document before you.

You're just starting to read the third paragraph, when your pen explodes all over the document you were reading. You grumble and start to clean it up. Then out of nowhere, a bird flies into your office window and it shatters. Remember, you still have ink all over your hands. You run to the window, and try to tape some newsprint up to keep the cold air out. Now your phone is ringing, so you try to answer it, with pen ink all over your hands and newspaper half taped on the broken window. You're holding your phone between your shoulder and your ear, trying to listen to the person on the other end. But your window is still open, so you're taping it at the same time. Then you try to get another piece of tape and you knock over your coffee. It's all over your work, and your laptop, so now you may have no way of re-printing the document you're meant to be reviewing. Your call waiting is beeping, but you forgot you were supposed to be listening to the person on the phone, so you ask them to repeat themselves while you frantically try to soak up your coffee with Kleenex. All it's doing is making the ink on your hands spread. Right! The person on the phone! You tell them you'll call them back because you can't manage everything right now. Then the phone rings again. Your boss is checking in to see how you're doing. You tell them everything's great, because you don't want to be a failure. You hang up, look at the state of your office, and wonder how your day got to this point. And then the fire alarm goes off, and everyone in the building runs outside as fast as possible. You can't even move because you're so in shock with what has happened to your office. You take a breath, start to clean-up, and prepare to do this all again when the bell rings for the second time, only this time, everyone is coming back into the building, and they're at your office door, expecting help with their own work.

Now imagine doing this every day. Think about what would have made the whole situation easier. A secretary to take your phone calls? A maintenance worker to repair the broken window? A housekeeper to help with the ink explosion and the coffee spill? A computer technician to help you fix your laptop? You might be thinking "I would deal with one issue at a time on my own", but that is NOT an option for teachers, as the 'issues' are actually children, not exploding pens and coffee spills. We are spread too thin. We can only do so much alone. We need help in our classrooms - NOT from outsiders telling us what we should be doing. We know what we should be doing, but we don't have the supports in our classrooms to do it.

Support would have made things more manageable for the editor you just became in your mind. Support will make teaching and learning easier in schools. Support is what we are fighting for, because learning is what we are fighting for!

Thank you

\*Names have been changed