

Attention Chair of Law Amendments referencing bill 75.

To Whom It May Concern,

First off, I would like to share my experiences, feelings, opinions and questions with all of the parties invested in the state of our Nova Scotia Education System. My name is Renee Curry, and I am a teacher. I have been teaching full time in the NS public school system since 2003. In this past 13+ years of my teaching career, I have I have witnessed, lived and fought through incredible hardship in attempting to provide the best for the education and advancement of the children our province. At this point, I have never been more disheartened and discouraged than I am now.

Teachers have sacrificed so much while giving their hearts and souls to support students. Despite the steady decline in supports available to meet the ever increasing needs, it is in our nature to do so. There are so many needs that require desperate attention, that I can't possibly address them all. Given this urgent, time sensitive, dire situation, I will attempt to address only the most important pressing issues that could be addressed immediately.

Given the aforementioned nature of teachers, I believe that McNeil has capitalized on this fact in order to 'maintain a balanced budget'. And I take on part of the blame for allowing it to escalate to this level. I understand how we could have be seen as 'easy targets'. Teachers ourselves are partly responsible for allowing this situation to evolve to this state by continuing to stand by and say yes to every impossible task being asked of us. However, it is clear that we have most certainly reached a breaking point. What has become crystal clear is that we can no longer carry the inadequacies and underfunding of the education system on our backs. When we 'make do', fill in the gaps, and try to plug holes by applying Band-Aids to gaping wounds, we allow this decay to grow. We have finally recognized that this is not helping our students, but only leading to the continued desecration of public education.

Mr. McNeil, it may sound in your ears that we are asking a lot. That the things we request we can simply not afford. But we the teachers are also we the taxpayers, the parents, and the residents of NS that have the foresight to see what investment in education means for the future of our province. I will try to explain my point in clear financial terms that I think you will understand. If we do not take steps toward improving the education system right now, the future financial burden on the province will be far reaching. With the state of our current education system, teachers cannot begin to level the playing field. The cycle of citizens whom require financial support, be it through social assistance, disability for ill mental health, incarceration or any other myriad of difficulties that prevent people from becoming self-sustaining employed citizens, will continue. And this will be costly. Educators strive to BREAK this cycle, not perpetuate it! We love our students and families and this is why we are outraged.

We recognize that the erosion of our education system has been growing over a number of years through cutbacks resulting in the increased expectations of teachers. We do not place the blame of this situation fully on the current elected party, nor would we expect it to be 'fixed' overnight. We certainly would never expect the enormity of the problems to be rectified through a tentative agreement for the teachers' contract! However, we did expect at least ONE tangible item in the offer that addressed our concerns and offer a glimmer of hope toward better working and learning conditions.

None of the agreements put forward have offered any tangible hope for the future. You say you have been listening to teachers, but then also say that you have been prevented from listening to teachers by

the union. Well, which is it? If anyone had been listening, then it would have been obvious that it would have taken very little for an agreement to be reached. We just need a show of good faith.

So, in attempt to address only the most important pressing issues, I will tell you again what teachers are asking for. It is really very simple. We need **"boots on the ground"** to support our classrooms with human resources. We need more EPA's, Speech Language Pathologists, Guidance Counsellors, Psychologists, EAL teachers, and classroom teachers. Obviously sufficient supports cannot be placed immediately, but this legislation does not allocate **any** resources to alleviate class composition and size concerns. We do not trust a partnership committee to address these issues. We certainly do not want to have another commission to study inclusion. We have already been there and done that recently, with The Freeman report. It is not the model that doesn't work, it is the lack of funding to support it! Why waste tax-payers dollars by incorporating those things in the contract? Use the 40 million allocated for these two items and make real investments in the classrooms!

I do not care that you have come to a tentative agreement **three** times that the NSTU has brought forward to its' members. The simple fact is that we have never been given a chance to engage in fair and collective bargaining no matter how many times you say it is true. With your continual threat of a legislated contract through bill 148, and now 75, in your back pocket, our union had little choice.

And your actions, with regard to the process by which you have literally rammed this piece of legislation through, is astounding.

You have rung an "emergency bell" immediately after the rejection of the third TA, insisting the utter urgency of the situation that WTR has NOW created. To be fair, when WTR was first announced, your education minister had no concerns and was ready to let it ride out. Well, until the day before it actually was to be implemented and then the panic ensued and it was decided to lock out the students for their own safety. Try to imagine as a teacher, how it must have felt to be accused of having the capacity to actually ignore the safety and welfare of children. If our own Education Minister and leader actually believed the people in charge of the students were that deplorable, then she really should have taken action much sooner. And when it was deemed safe enough (the next day) to resume teaching our students, teachers were allowed to get back to teaching. Students have been safe since the Dec. 5<sup>th</sup> implementation of WRT. There is no need to panic and call a state of emergency in the middle of a blizzard when the rest of the province is shut down!

WTR has been hard on everyone, but there are many things about it that have indeed helped me to make meager strides toward levelling the playing field. I have had more time to focus on teaching.

Although I remain disheartened and discouraged, I have used what strength I have left to deliver my impassioned plea. Please take a stand for the future of our province. Please be strong enough to recognize how unconstitutional, irresponsible, and harmful this piece of legislation really is. It is only you who have the power to right this wrong. You know what we need.

Thank you for your time,

Respectfully,

Renee Curry.