
From: Matt Boudreau [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 16, 2017 12:17 PM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: Law Amendments Committee, Opposition to Bill 75

Hello,

As it seems I will not be able to present to the Law Amendments Committee in person, I am forwarding and submitting the statement I would have presented.

Matthew Boudreau

Law Amendments Committee Statement (Bill 75)

My name is Matthew Boudreau and I am an English and Social Studies teacher here in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I have worked as a teacher for 12 years in four different public schools in the Halifax area and I am very grateful to have this opportunity today to address the Law Amendments Committee.

I consider myself an optimistic person but the government's tabling of Bill 75 has left me feeling demoralized, embarrassed and anxious that I must be here today to defend myself and my profession against this government's heavy-handed approach to collective bargaining. I believe in our democratic institutions and the various mechanisms available that protect our civil rights and I never thought that I would ever have a Premier, a Minister of Education and a government that would vilify my profession for political gains. I cannot believe that this government seems to consider our education system as nothing but a draw on the public purse and that teachers' concerns are not worth listening to, let alone, be acted upon.

As a teacher of Law 12, Political Science 12 and Canadian History 11 I have visited this legislature with my high school students many times over

my career. I planned these trips because I truly believed that in order to inspire young people to take their citizenship seriously, and to show them that their rights are guaranteed and protected by what happens here. I told them because we have this house, governments cannot abuse their power. In this very room a few years ago, I arranged for 18 Law 12 students to meet and chat with MLA Kelly Regan, who was an opposition MLA at the time. She took the time to show them how her job works and I remember feeling so impressed that an elected official would take the time to inspire our young people. This current situation is therefore incredibly shocking for me. That the very person who so impressed me and my students that day did absolutely nothing as Minister of Labour to protect my constitutional rights from the tactics of Stephen McNeil and Karen Casey.

Education Minister Karen Casey, who despite having served as Minister of Education for both Liberal and Conservative governments and who so often speaks of her collaborative nature when it comes to making the best decisions for the education system, has sought to divide Nova Scotians. As a teacher who was selected to participate in the creation and implementation of Teaching Standards last year, I can assure the public that her collaboration involves paying lip service to teacher concerns and little else. Indeed, Bill 75 is a prime example of the Minister's lack of collaboration. This proposed law is being pursued without the sanction nor support of at least 78.5% of teachers, as the results of the last NSTU contract ratification vote has demonstrated.

Through Bill 75, she has even sought to punish teachers vindictively for having defied her by revoking gains on salary and preparation time that teachers had won in this third failed agreement. While I completely understand, though do not condone, her motive when it comes to punishing defiant teachers such as myself, the funding associated with these gains could have easily been attached to classroom-level improvements such as mental health services, EPAs and class caps for our students. But, instead it seems these tens of millions of dollars are simply lost.

Under Premier McNeil's leadership, public faith and respect for teachers and public institutions has eroded away. He has actively sown the seeds of

division in order to distract the people of this province from his true agenda of union busting. Under his tenure, he has implemented economic policies that have ensured workers are in a race to the bottom rather than to the top. If you will permit me, I would like to use his own words in order to show that Nova Scotians' faith in him is entirely misplaced. In the past he has gone on record stating that he and his caucus, and I quote, 'believe in the collective bargaining process, the right to strike and in protecting workers' rights, both unionized and non-unionized.'

The tabling of Bill 75, which unilaterally imposes on teachers a contract which for all intents and purposes was rejected three times, proves that Premier McNeil is a politician of the most disingenuous kind and that he believes in democracy only until it interferes with his political agenda.

By design, democracy is inconvenient for governments. It ensures that a chosen few cannot dictate to the whole and that you simply cannot change the rules when things don't go your way. Your government can impose the Premier's will upon any group you like: be they teachers, nurses, doctors, judges and various other government employees. But this will not be done seamlessly nor with our consent.

And while this bill has far reaching consequences for all workers and raises serious questions about the nature of democracy in this province, unfortunately, students will ultimately pay the biggest price for this government's intransigence. They deserve better. And I fear more councils, more committees and more commissions will only confirm what we teachers already know. We need investments in mental health services, classroom resources, sensible policies on attendance and assessment and significant amounts of preparation time to implement these improvements.

And then, we simply need to be trusted.

As a teacher, citizen and taxpayer of Nova Scotia I therefore recommend the government withdraw Bill 75 and that it finally allows a process of free and fair collective bargaining to begin.