

## Law Amendments Committee

It would have been my wish to have appeared before the committee in person today but that seemed impossible yesterday due to my need to be at work and then it seemed too dangerous to do it today. So sending a written submission is my second choice.

I will begin by setting the stage a bit. My grandmother was a teacher, and she is responsible for my love of learning and education. One of those who influenced me significantly in my teenage years, was my high school Math teacher, who always believed in me even when I didn't and she had a way of encouraging and supporting her students that I strive to emulate every day. My husband is a teacher, my niece is currently at the Mount studying to become a teacher and of course it is my chosen path as well. Education is and has been entwined in every part of my life.

I have a degree in Mathematics and a minor in English from Saint Mary's University, a degree in Education with a special education certificate, and a Masters degree in Education Leadership both from Acadia University. A total of 9 years of post-secondary education, not to mention the countless hours of inservicing, training, workshops, conferences and lectures that I have attended, many on my own time. I have had the opportunity, in my 24 years as an educator, to teach every grade in the elementary school, courses at every level in the high school, was a middle school resource teacher for several years and I taught the TMH (trainable mentally handicap) class for a year at the beginning of my career. I have seen a lot and have had the opportunity to explore the diverse ways that education works at a variety of levels. I am currently and have been for the last 14 years, a high school Math and Calculus teacher. I am very proud to be married to an educator with similar experience and education who works every day with students who have significant learning disabilities. I speak from a place of personal experience and my observations of this 16 month process to achieve a new contract with our government come from being in a school and in a classroom and speaking to parents and other teachers every day. Although the issues we face in our schools have not just happened, this process has done more damage in a short time than I have observed in my whole career.

As a teacher I always strive to set an example for my students. As a result when they are struggling I do whatever I can to support them, when they are frustrated I work to ease their concerns, when they are voicing concerns, I listen and use it as an opportunity to make valuable changes in my approach. It is my job and more important it is who I am that when there is a problem I strive to address it in a respectful and productive way and that process is ongoing until a resolution can be found. What is this process teaching our students about problem solving, about democracy, about respectful human interaction and about the value of education?

As a teacher I work hard to promote a strong work ethic among my students. It is not an easy task because as I am sure you can imagine, Calculus has its difficulties and there are often frustrations and times when it really does appear there is no solution, but there always is. I teach my students to not give up but rather to take a new approach and to work, on even the most frustrating problem, because a successful solution is worth the effort. That is certainly not the message that my students and their families are getting from this government.

As a teacher I try to balance the idea of choice, flexibility and options with that of a firm stand because I know that a true sense of accomplishment comes from working together and not just being the boss. Students, people in general work so much better together when everyone feels that they truly have a say in how things are going to happen. When I give students choices,

choices that contain viable and responsible options, they very often can find a way to do what they need to in a way that works for them. Being too flexible or too rigid doesn't work. It requires a balance. But once that balance is struck it is amazing to see the plan evolve and many times it turns out to be better than if I had imposed my own ideas only. It's about trusting people to ultimately make the right decisions for themselves and others and believing that there is always another way other than my own to consider. There is always a middle ground. A colleague of mine once gave me a very important piece of advice. She said "...when dealing with others it's always better to be a willow than an oak. A willow will be flexible under pressure and as a result will go on to flourish and prosper. The oak is strong, yet rigid and will snap under strain". Her point is well taken. It's never in anyone's best interest to behave like an oak when the storm gets more intense.

As a teacher I encourage my students to be very careful who they listen to, and to always be certain when they are taking advice that is advice that they truly believe in. They must weigh carefully who they choose to confide in and what kind of influence those friends might have, after all as my mother used to say "you're only as good as the band you play in". I do this because it is so important as a person of influence that you help guide those who you are responsible for. If you allow those around you to take you down a dark path, it is then your responsibility to find a safe and reasonable way out. You can't then blame others for your bad behavior especially if you had been forewarned. Educators work with students all the time to help them navigate these difficult alliances and life circumstances and in the process encourage them to take responsibility for their own part in the mess that has been created. It would be my wish that someone in our government would just step up and take responsibility for this mess.

As a teacher I have faced a great number of questions about the crazy things that are happening in the name of government with our neighbor to the south. It has provided many opportunities for discussion and for learning. One of the things I am most proud of as a Canadian is that we have a leader who is willing to take the tough questions and he still responds with a respectful and honest answer and most times tries to see the issue from both sides. Throughout the US election my students marveled at the chaos that was their election campaigns and the disbelief they had at the results. The unfortunate part of this experience is that what they are learning is that someone who is elected to represent the people can actually do whatever they want once they are in power. Interestingly I had a student ask me yesterday how our premier is any different. It was one of the toughest questions I have been faced with, because in my life experience I know our Premier wants nothing less than to be compared to such a leader but how can I explain that to a 17 year old who sees only a leader who seems to do whatever it takes to get what he wants even if it means forcing his will on the people who elected him. I would need to do some soul searching of my own to come up with a good answer.

As a teacher when I am marking tests I always do whatever I can to find value in a student's work. I tell them to show me everything they know. As a result students respond very positively to my efforts and are appreciative of my support and learn from where they went wrong. I would never give a student a zero on any assignment that they clearly worked hard on, did their best under what can be impossible circumstances and knowing that the next time they will show up again and do their best. What message does getting zero send? Ask a teacher and they can tell you that a zero means you did nothing right, your work is worth nothing, you have learned nothing, it appears you did not try at all, there is absolutely no value in what you have done. Interestingly there is a government imposed no zero policy and yet that is exactly what they have seen fit to give teachers in the first 2 years of this imposed contract. They have chosen to award teachers for a job well done, with the worst of all of the 3 options when it comes to

financial compensation. What does that say about the value this government places on teachers?

As a teacher I choose to be honest and straight forward with my students. I tell them when things are off the rails and I don't even sugar coat it, though I always do it respectfully. However, if the problem is a systemic one, a problem with the administration or a difficulty among teachers it would never even cross my mind to blame the students. That doesn't even make sense. Yet a systemic issue with how our Education system is run in this province and how it has been allowed to deteriorate to this point has become a punitive issue by government towards the teachers.

As a teacher I am disheartened and discouraged. I love my job, I love the kids I teach and I am so proud to be a teacher. Work to Rule has not had the negative impact on many classrooms that the government is suggesting. I have had so much more time with my students and created a much better home and work balance since this has been in place. As one mother said to me, "my kids can live without hockey and dances but where will they be if those most passionate about educating our children are repeatedly treated like they don't matter". We need vibrant new minds to become teachers, we need to see education as the way of the future, we need to invest in education and strive to educate students to be the best in the world, we need to have a passion for education in a way that makes our government stop trying to be right and start doing the right thing.

As a teacher I ask that you rethink Bill 75 and instead of forcing us to do it your way, work with us to do it the right way.

Sincerely

Lisa Chance