
From: Robyn Cobean [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 16, 2017 12:03 PM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: Law Amendments Submission

I am submitting my letter for Law Amendments as I haven't received a time, even though I've called twice and received one call back to confirm I was on the list. Thank you,
Robyn Cobean
Bedford, NS

I am here today to give a message of thanks to Stephen McNeil and his Liberal Government. This may come as a shock to those present, as I am a teacher.
To begin, I want to thank the Liberals for giving me the impetus to walk through these Legislature doors for the first time, not simply rally outside of them. To be clear, I am absolutely opposed to Bill 75.

I want to thank the Premier for uniting our union to an unprecedented level. We stand behind our leadership. We carry on honest and meaningful conversations with each other. We share the stories of our daily struggles. We have harnessed the power of social media, and used it to successfully unite our province in the fight for our children's rights. We have brought together past, present and future members and leaders in a show of force and determination. NSTUnited is more than a hashtag. Our level of engagement will persist beyond this crisis. We will continue to be active and involved, and pursue real, meaningful change for our workplace and for our students. Without Bill 148 being passed frantically and desperately in the dead of night in December 2015, this never would have occurred.

I want to thank the McNeil government for creating a new generation of political activists. The blatant disregard for collective bargaining by this government has lit a fiery political passion in the majority of us, as seen by our voting turnout and results. Beyond municipal, provincial, and federal voting days, most of us were complacent and paid little attention to the politics that governed our daily lives. Now, we know all of your names. Now, we know our MLAs personally. Now, we look up how each MLA voted in particular Bills of interest, like this one. Now, we understand the process of legislation, we know the definition of collective bargaining, and we will stand firm to protect our rights. We will flex our newfound power at the voting booths come election time. We are fully engaged in the democratic process. That is quite a feat.

I want to thank this government for giving teachers and parents a platform to get to the real crux of the problem – our education system. Before this debacle, most parents sent their children to school each day, and knew nothing of the realities their children were experiencing. They didn't know that their child, who struggled to read, only got 1 hour of resource every other week, even though they were in grade four and reading at a Primary level. They didn't know that resource time had been withdrawn 10-12 weeks of the school year, while early literacy and resource teachers conducted IPP meetings and observation survey assessments, without substitute coverage. They didn't know these same teachers were being called away from school, for mandatory PD, without substitute coverage to support their child back at school. They didn't know when new initiatives like Grade 3 ELT were introduced, it further cut resource time for students on the existing caseload. They didn't know how many hours were spent by teachers inputting data, minutes, and other accountability measures into a computer system, which costs millions of dollars and comes out of the education budget. They didn't know that out of 30 students in their child's class, 10 may be on IPPs, 14 on adaptations, and only one EPA was allotted to support just one student, while three EPAs were actually required to support many more. They didn't know that teachers volunteered their lunch hours to give extra help. They thought this was a requirement of their job. They didn't understand that if class compositions were manageable, if students were

supported from early grades on, their child wouldn't need ongoing extra help outside of class hours. Students would be able to manage with the extra support the teacher could give them during class time. They didn't know their child in high school had no seat when they got to class. They didn't know their child's teacher had too little prep time. They didn't know their child's teacher spent hundreds, if not thousands of their own dollars, every year, to ensure there were enough materials and supplies to teach engaging lessons and allow all children to participate in the lesson. They didn't know children couldn't fail without parental consent, and that failure was an almost extinct occurrence. They didn't know a child could miss over 400 school days by the time they were in upper elementary, yet still pass into the next grade without meeting the outcomes, even IPP outcomes. They didn't know that the mental health of many of our students was in crisis, and there aren't enough supports through the government, or our own counselors, to deal with it. They didn't know that staff and administration work overtime to ensure there are protocols in each school so their child doesn't get physically harmed. They didn't know that almost every child suffers in most classes – struggling learners, average learners, learners with special needs, and gifted learners – because not one single one of them gets the attention they need or deserve. They didn't know there were initiatives like mandatory, documented PLCs and School Improvement Plans, which take countless hours of time from teachers with no documented gains. They didn't know that the teachers themselves, are able to conduct reading, writing and math assessments, on their own, which can give them the imperative information they need to instruct, without costing a cent, or taking precious instructional time away. They didn't know teachers were afraid to speak out – in public, in PD sessions, in staff meetings - about the obvious obstacles that are mounting in the system. I'm not sure if the government could foresee, when they first presented TA1, and subsequently Bill 148, how things would unravel. Pandora's box was opened, and it can never be shut; not until real changes, real movement, and real listening on the part of the government takes place which will begin to address the very real problems in our schools. Disregarding our concerns, and so deeply disrespecting us as professionals, has given us the voice to never be complacent again.

I want to thank you for your focus on fiscal responsibility and austerity. It has lent itself to deep scrutiny by the public on government spending, and perhaps the misallocation of taxpayers' dollars. Ask any teacher, read any post, and the cost free measures are there at your fingertips: attendance policies, discipline policies, restrictions on the mandated use of Tienet and Powerschool, discontinuing constant modifications to Tienet which only increase time demands, restricting new initiatives, suspending current useless initiatives. Why spend money on substitutes so we can conduct time consuming assessments, when you can simply suspend them? These questions have arisen due to the touting of the fiscal line. Your lack of acknowledgement of these cost free measures to solve some of the problems in our education system, has revealed your true colours. For that, we thank you.

I want to thank the Liberals for uniting students, parents, teachers and other community members. You have truly united a province. The support from Students for Teachers, and Parents for Teachers, has been unwavering and inexhaustible. By social media tallies alone, our stories have resonated with tens of thousands of people. We know we are not underappreciated by the community behind our students. We will never again feel so piercingly the scorn of negative public remarks about us, because we have the buffer of their support to counter it. They have given us armour.

I want to thank this Liberal government for reminding us that mistakes are for learning, if we choose to view them as such. We made a huge mistake when we gave up indexed pensions. We were promised, in exchange for giving them up, that our contributions would not increase. They have; by three percent. We will not let you take our service award as well, stripping us of a negotiated benefit. You have reminded us to be cognizant of our past, of our mistakes, and move forward with them in mind. We almost forgot to do so.

I want to thank you for solidifying the bond between the unions. We have seen this demonstrated at each rally. We regularly see public statements of support from unions throughout the province, and from across the entire country. They rally alongside us. They speak with us and for us. With the majority of your public worker contracts expired in this province, the unity we had already forged, but you have inadvertently strengthened, is tangible.

This party deserves an exceptional thank you for exposing their own hypocrisy. It makes for interesting reading when reviewing Karen Casey's remarks when in opposition, or Mr. McNeil's remarks when campaigning; particularly about collective bargaining. Watching their actions directly contradict their statements is a fascinating lesson in politics, campaigning, and the transformation of character for some politicians when they achieve a position of power.

I want to thank this government's actions for leading me into a new area of research: neoliberalism. Until now, I had no idea this was even a 'thing'. Now I have come to understand, that one must be extremely careful when considering a Liberal vote, as a Liberal can be a wolf disguised in sheep's clothing. Fiscal austerity is at the core of neoliberalism, with a focus on reducing government spending. Cutting public expenditure for social services like education and healthcare is one of the defining characteristics. It has been coined 'the ideology at the root of all our problems'. The problems we are facing here in NS, under this Liberal party, make more sense in this context. It is now on us to be ever more vigilant. That is never a bad thing.

Finally, I want to thank all of the Liberals for bringing out the best in us. We continue to devote ourselves to our students, as always, each and every day in the classroom (and just to clarify, that is where we have been, teaching, each and every day, except the day the students were locked out by this government). We stand up for each other as brothers and sisters in arms, and for our profession. We proudly look the public in the eye when we say we are teachers, instead of shying away, afraid to hear disparaging remarks about us, particularly about snow days and summers off. We commiserate through humour and creativity. In spite of how you think you have demoralized us, we regularly laugh out loud at the extremely creative and interesting posts we create about the current state of affairs. We have continued to do what we do best – educate ourselves. We are lifelong learners. We research, share information, fact check, investigate, refute, rebut, defend, enlighten, and engage. We have come to know our own voice and strength. We are inexhaustible. Our strength is limitless. Our resilience grows with each Tentative Agreement that insults our sense of worth, dignity, and intelligence. You forget that we are your best resource and consultants in education. We are free consultants, available to you at any time. We encourage you to engage in true, meaningful dialogue and bargaining, and salvage what you can prior to the upcoming election.

Thank you.