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Emailed Submission to the Law Amendments Committee by Teresa d'Entremont-February 16, 2017

I would have liked to ask to address this committee in person, however for citizens who live outside of Halifax this is difficult to do at short notice and in winter weather. However, I hope that this will be considered in spite of not being able to be there in person.

Disappointment, disbelief, and disgust, are some of the feelings I have had in the last few months over the way that that teachers, staff, students, and parents of Nova Scotia are being treated. Bill 75 is now going to be imposed on teachers. Being the parent of two daughters, who are being educated in the NS public school system, I could not let this happen without submitting my voice to this matter and to say how much I do not want this to happen. I wanted to be able to look at my daughters, their teachers, and the staff of their schools and say, I put my voice out there, I tried to do something to stop Bill 75.

As a parent I was grateful that the NSTU and their members decided to take the less disruptive action of not going on a strike, but deciding to engage in Work to Rule (which is just following their job duties). This would still present challenges, difficulties, confusion, and disappointment, for both the teachers and their students, but it was still better than having them on strike and not at school.

Contrary to Minister Karen Casey's attempt to say this was not going to be safe for our children back on December 3, 2016, when she announced the closure of all public schools on Monday, December 5, 2016, it has been safe. In fact, that thought had not even occurred to me when the Work to Rule Action was announced. I was actually left more confused by Minister Casey saying it was unsafe. How was it that my children were going to be in a dangerous situation because their teachers were going to go to school and do their job, but just not the extra stuff like staying to coach handball after their work day ended?

I would also like to point out to you that the principal, Pam DeViller and her staff, at École Belleville, in Belleville, Yarmouth, County, NS, where my two daughters attend school has done an outstanding job of keeping us updated and informed, and they have kept my children safe. As I assume from what I am hearing from others has been the case in many of the schools in Nova Scotia under Work to Rule action.

One good thing that may come from this is the awakening that I believe has occurred among citizens of Nova Scotia. I think many of us have realized that we can no longer trust that the politicians we vote for and elect will necessarily take our concerns and voices forward to Province House for us. I know my MLA Zach Churchill has not.

We have been shocked and horrified by stories detailing the days teachers, staff, and students are experiencing:

- Being bogged down on a daily basis trying to do paper work, tracking grades and attendance through various data management systems, instead of working and assisting their students
- Preparing a plan for their day (often on their own unpaid time) of multiple lessons with modifications and adaptations that are required to meet the needs of all the students in their classrooms

- The challenges and struggles for teachers to accept that they have had to take Work to Rule action and to see the demoralizing effect and strain this has caused to their students and colleagues
- Teachers, their classroom assistants, and students who are being subjected to dangerous and sometimes violent situations in their classrooms

We are also hearing the good things:

- Teachers who are donating the strike pay they will earn on Feb. 17, 2017, to fund spots for childcare for those in their community who can not afford to take a day off from their work or pay for childcare for the day
- Classroom resources that are being bought by teachers from their own pockets for their students
- Students who continue to support their teachers during the Work To Rule job action, even though they are disappointed and missing out on opportunities, that they now realize were not part of their teachers duties or paid time and were taken for granted

In spite of all this they come back day after day and continue to do the best they can and work the hardest they can. This is what I see, this is their calling, a love for their profession. I believe it is those good things we see each day despite the bad things we hear and see that keep them coming. How many of us would go to our work each day, year after year to these conditions? I am guessing not many.

Our province needs educational reform, our system is broken and it is no longer working. For 122 years, the NSTU has been able to bargain with governments of all types, through all sorts of economic situations. But this is the first time in 122 years that it has come to Work To Rule and strike action. That tells me a lot! The educators of our province are no longer able to sit back and accept deals they know are not going to make the change they are asking for and need in order to be able to do their job.

Working for almost 20 years myself, in the social services field, I have worked with many people who have learning challenges, disabilities, and literacy issues. People who are in crisis situations, involved in the justice system, living in cycles of poverty, discrimination, and abuse. I have had my eyes opened because of this to what teachers are struggling and dealing with and how interconnected the education system is to many parts of our lives and the overall well being and economy of our democracy.

Because of this I have empathy and an understanding of the struggle teachers are facing daily in working with the current system they have. They are trying to work in this system to help produce students who will have the skills to live daily life in society, to have the skills to break cycles of poverty, discrimination, and, abuse. To have the skills to become our future employers, HR managers, and co-workers. To have the skills, interest, and abilities to become the future teachers, voters, Ministers of Education, and Premiers of our province. I challenge, even those who struggled or hated school, to think back and I am sure each of you can name at least one teacher who stood out for you, who encouraged, even just once. I bet that has stayed with you your entire life, I know I can.

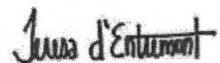
Nova Scotia does not need “a Council to Improve Classroom Conditions” as is laid out in section 68C.01 of Bill 75, that exists already, not in a formal way but it exists. Instead listen and hear to what the teachers have been trying to raise as issues to be worked on while trying to negotiate this contract.

What Nova Scotia needs is a way to work with what we have now, like I said above it exists already and it should not cost a lot more money. We need to have better integration of many services we have in place and are funding now. We have some really great resources, skills, and talent, right in front of us, we need to have help for the education system have an easy and efficient way for teachers to access these resources and expertise for themselves to serve students and to be simple to refer families and students to, so they can get back to teaching. Things that can be improve like SchoolPlus.

We can no longer expect teachers to bare this burden on their own or to be the ones left alone to raise our children, that is not their job. Creating a society with people with skills, abilities, and knowledge to live and work productively has always been and always should be something we all are taking an active interest in, not leaving it or trying to have it left to teachers.

Earlier this school year, the teacher of my eldest daughter emailed my husband and me to let us know of some issues she noticed our daughter had in completing her school work. These were things I had wondered about myself over the last years that she has been in school. She does well at school but she has challenges and works hard to do her best in school. Now the teacher was seeing her challenges too, bringing that to our attention only to be left to tell us that there was nothing more that they were going to be able to offer at this point to help with the issue, since it was not bad enough to be affecting her too much. We had to take on the burden of finding a qualified professional that would meet the requirements of our benefit plan so that we would could be reimbursed for the \$1000 (which can cost much more than that I am aware). The last two Saturdays our daughter has taken her time to meet with a psychologist to do this assessment. We will see what the outcomes of the assessment are in a few weeks. While we wait for the report on this assessment, I am left to wonder if the school will be able to provide the resources that may be recommended? We as her parents will do our best to implement what we can on her behalf. I have heard this story from may other parents over the years too. I am lucky that I have this opportunity to provide this assessment and voice and assistance for my daughter. It makes me sad to know that there are many parents who have to get this information and won't have the resources on their own to try to help their child. Where in Bill 75 is there a solution for this? I have reviewed it a few times and I still don't see it.

Respectfully submitted,



Teresa d'Entremont