

Submission to the

Law Amendments Committee on Bill 75

An Act Respecting a Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvements

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I would like to thank the Chair and members of the Law Amendments Committee for this opportunity to share my thoughts with you today about Bill 75. It is unfortunate that I have not been permitted time to present to the Committee in person, so this written submission must suffice.

My name is Allison Stewart and I am a proud member of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union. I am also a former page of the Nova Scotia House of Assembly; while I regret that it is under such inauspicious circumstances that I return to the legislature today-- in protest-- I shall do as needs must.

Bill 75 proposes to impose a legislated contract upon the NSTU in lieu of allowing the course of free and fair collective bargaining. As such, I find the very premise of this legislation to be both abhorrent and antidemocratic; however, I shall endeavour to detail for you the items contained therein which I perceive to be most objectionable.

The most glaring issue in this legislation is not what it does contain, but rather, what it omits. Bill 75 offers no meaningful solutions to address the complexities of our twenty-first-century classrooms. Though my experience as an educator pales in comparison to many of my colleagues speaking today, I have taught for several years, both here at home as well as abroad. While I had more lucrative opportunities to teach elsewhere, I genuinely returned home out of an altruistic desire to give back to the society which afforded me so many opportunities. Upon my return to Nova Scotia, I spent much of last year as a day-to-

day substitute teacher. As such, I have both a wide and deep understanding of the classrooms in our province today.

Demands on educators have increased markedly, even in the relatively short time in which I have been part of the teaching profession. Since our job action began, I have felt free of the tether I felt to my ancient classroom computer, allowing me to be fully present to the students in front of me in a way I had hitherto neglected to appreciate that I missed. Teaching, like politics, is a vocation, not an occupation. As educators, our successes are inextricably bound with those of the children in our charge. The inverse relationship between teacher stress and student performance indicators is well-documented. The current regime of data collection expected by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is overly onerous on classroom teachers with no positive impact on students. No pig has ever gotten any fatter by weighing it. Indeed, what standardized tests do tell us are two things: how practiced students are in taking standardized tests, and the affluence of the school catchment area. Meaningful data is best captured by classroom teachers in assessments that reflect their professional judgement. Nova Scotia is currently fortunate enough to have the best-qualified cohort of teachers this province has ever seen. This government would be well served to heed the clamour from this workforce calling for meaningful reforms to our public education system in the face of its present dysfunction.

Teenagers of today are more observant than many adults recognize. When students perceive their teachers being disrespected and maligned in society at large, it normalizes this attitude. Teachers are diminished in students' eyes when they observe that our

contributions are not valued by our employer, thus compounding the challenges of teachers to assert the value of education. Our education system is in crisis. This is not "just noise," as the Premier has alluded. As a teaching profession, we have passed the breaking point. There can be no putting the genie back in the bottle. What we need is political will to reform our education system to properly reflect the needs of our twenty-first century learners. The status quo is serving no one's interests, least of all the hopes of a prosperous Nova Scotia for future generations.

I exhort you, on behalf of my teaching colleagues as well as the students of this province to please oppose this bill. It is no hyperbole to say that the future livelihood of this province depends upon it.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Allison Stewart