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To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: Vote no

Sharing the words of a colleague ... I truly believe in each word
Don't let bill 75 pass.

Melissa walsh

Teacher for 14 years and mother of three daughters in our broken education system .

Attention: Law Amendment Committee Feb. 17, 2017

Please note the following was written as a speech and I've adapted it as much as I can in a short time frame. It would have been easier to follow as a speech. Also, I need to admit that I did not spend enough time rereading this because I truly believe only a handful of you will actually take the time to skim it. I apologize in advance for any errors, but I welcome constructive feedback as proof that you did read this speech!

I was going to thank you for the chance to speak, but you did not want to grant me my right to speak. You did not allow me to come into the House to share my concerns about Bill 75. You did not want to give me five minutes of time for something that is life changing for me, for my children and for my students. Thank you to the people on the committee who tried to make more time for all voices to be heard. I empathize with you because your voices have not been heard or considered through this whole process either. The Liberals are making it very clear they are only concerned for their own party, to the extent that they do not even notice the destruction they are causing to all Nova Scotians and to their own party - or worse, they don't care.

You sat through some presentations, and I choose the word sat because I am certain that many members of this committee shut their ears and minds off since being told what their position needs to be. It is impossible to be truly listening to the brave speakers who poured their hearts and souls out to you through their personal experiences and still think it is a good idea to legislate the NSTU instead of bargain with us. As unacceptable as it was, I understand why some members of the committee desperately tried to shut out the speeches while people took their time to share very difficult experiences and personal stories.

I want to be sure to be heard, by everyone. So, make it interesting for yourself if you have been feeling bothered or bored by listening to voters. Pick a set of ears to listen with, or now since you cannot hear my voice, pick a set of eyes to read with:

1) You can pretend to have a cognitive delay and be stuck (forever) at a 4 year old mindset and comprehension. You don't have an EPA, but it's okay, you're included and you'll be pushed along at the same rate as your colleagues.

- 2) You can pretend to have a low percentage of receptive language so you only understand a few words that I say/write. You don't have an EPA, but it's okay, you're included and you might get speech support every few weeks if you're lucky to help you with your comprehension.
- 3) You can pretend to be on the spectrum and have difficulty handling social situations (even though you're constantly surrounded by people and not all of them act like angels all of the time). You are also fixated on that snowman you didn't get to finish at break and nobody can help you out because there are no extra bodies to help you finish it to move on or to work through the frustration. It's fine because you are included and you will get to have an EPA for a bit of the time, if no EPAs called in sick.
- 4) You can pretend to have ADHD. It's no problem though because you're included and you will be redirected all day long. Sorry you can't take any breaks because there's no extra body to support that, but just push through and year after year you'll just learn behaviours (good or bad) to manage.
- 5) You can pretend to come from a difficult home and you are worried about when you leave here. You don't know when you'll get to eat next, you don't know who will be at home when you get there, you don't have any clean or other clothes for tomorrow. No problem, you're included, but sorry you can't speak to any guidance supports because you are not suicidal at this moment - and, you're included.
- 6) Pretend you don't speak or read or understand English. It's not even a second language of yours. You're included and you will be smiled at and loved, but you won't understand much of what is happening. You might get to spend 30 minutes with an interpreter or language worker once a week.

I can go on and on with different sets of ears and eyes. This last set I will mention might be the most difficult for some of you to take on.

- 7) You can pretend that you have a mind of your own. You are a critical thinker and do not let other people, even leaders, tell you what to think and what to do. You make your own decisions and make your voice heard with what you know is right in your gut after being open to hearing/reading all sides of a situation. It's a scary position to take, but it's okay, you're included in this outcome, you are brave and your vote is your own.

Please, choose your ears/eyes and let's learn together.

I do not even know why I am bothering. This is the new attitude that I have unfortunately arrived at with everything that is happening to teachers with the legislation of a contract. It is taking everything I have right now to greet my students with a smile and to be ready to work with them. It is taking me everything I have to feel proud of the work I do with such bully tactics, disdain and disrespect that I have felt from my Government. Please listen with open ears, read with an open mind and think about what I say/write. This is not politics to me. This is my life. This is my children's lives. This is my students' lives. This is our everyday learning.

I can empathize with having difficult decisions to make. I have difficult decisions to make too. The decisions I have to make affect the little people who are learning and who I dedicate myself to and work with for a full

school year. These little people are our future and they desperately need a strong education. The current system is not offering enough support for our learners and it is putting me and other NSTU members in an unethical situation of pretending everything is okay.

Even though I have a long list of students who need resource support, I have to pick and choose who will get that support because there is not enough to provide resource for everyone in need. Even though I have a long list of students who need a boost with their reading and writing to ensure their success, I have to choose one or two for English Language support because there is not enough support to provide it for everyone in need. Even though there are many students who need Learning Center learning, break or reward time, I have to choose who will get that time and they never get enough of what they need because there just isn't enough support for all of the children in need. Even though I have a large handful of students who need an Education Program Assistant, they all have to tag off of one partial EPA that is assigned to one child in my classroom for part of the day. Even though there are a large handful of my students who need intense speech language support, only a few of them get to have about 20 minutes of speech therapy every couple of weeks beginning in November. This is not intense and it is no way near enough for such language and comprehension needs.

Parents WANT to hear that their children don't need much support. Parents want to hear that we are doing our best for their children. Parents want to hear that the school is taking care of all of the needs of their children. We are taking advantage of their vulnerability by not telling them the truth. We cannot support their children with the resources that we have. This is not an issue with a temporary work to rule. This is an issue with the permanent system that needs to be fixed and the legislated contract is ignoring it all. I am not going to lie to parents anymore. I cannot stand the feeling of covering up for such an unethical practice of education.

There are other ways forward through negotiations and the union has made it clear that we are open to fair, collective bargaining. If you can at all think of another way forward, please vote to reject the Bill. When I take students to team meetings to look for suggestions and supports I am always told that there is no more support, so we just need to be creative with what we already have. Well, I am asking you to be creative. I'm asking you to think of immediate actions to support teachers and students, beginning with rejecting the legislation. I'm asking you to respect teachers and students by negotiating a fair, but productive contract.

Please consider people over money. Please consider a prosperous future instead of fixating on a balanced budget now. I am not a political person. I rarely pay much attention to what is happening in our political world. I mainly trust the elected people to make the hard choices for me, assuming they know more about the issues than I do. Through the mistreatment and bullying of teachers by McNeil and his Liberal Party, I have learned how wrong this choice of mine was and I will not make that mistake again. I am disgusted at the lies and spins on information and am taken aback to see how easy it seems to be for people in such positions of power to trash and belittle hard, honest workers who do not have a way to speak back to defend themselves.

Anyone who is willing to take the rights away from law abiding, tax paying citizens will not get my vote.

I urge a vote to reject Bill 75. As a mother of a school aged child and a preschooler, I beg you to reject Bill 75. As a teacher for 10 years and hoping to last many more, I ask you to respectfully reject Bill 75.