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February 16, 2017

To: Law Amendments Committee,

Dear Ms. Whelan and Committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee. Over my 23-year teaching career I have taught hundreds of children. I thank you for this opportunity to have my say without the fear of reprisal that so many of my colleagues feel. I know there are many teachers who will not sign-up to come before you to share their experiences, as they are concerned about disciplinary action. Some of our youngest members are just so happy to be employed they feel they risk losing their positions or their opportunity for future employment should they become an education "whistle blower."

I am hoping that by sharing a snippet my experiences with this committee that you and the general public will begin to understand why passing this bill or any future bill that would legislate a contract for teachers would set-up our public school system for continued, unnecessary conflict and disruption. As this committee has heard, we work in a system, many years in the making, that has created a culture of mistrust and a break-down of relationships.

What every teacher knows, no matter their number of years of experience is that it is the relationships we have with our students, their parents, our entire school community that make all the difference. Everything a good teacher does is meant to build community. Everything I've learned about the important stuff a teacher should know and do has this at the core-relationships. Yet, the additions to the tasks and the changes that are happening in the job description for a Nova Scotian teacher make finding the time to maintain those relationships very challenging.

Ten years ago I made the decision to leave the classroom. I considered leaving teaching all together. I was an experienced and capable teacher who always received very favourable evaluations. I went to a counsellor at the NSTU and asked, "How do I leave this profession? How do I walk away?" We talked about the stress I was feeling and the guilt I was carrying about not being able to meet the needs of the students in my class. I was teaching a very typical elementary classroom with almost half of the students on individualized or adapted plans, 2 or 3 students with

mental health issues that had behavioural challenges, I had some program assistant support for 1 student with physical mobility needs. Also, 2 new students joined us that year. They didn't speak English and hadn't been in school for several years prior. I also had about a third of my class living in poverty. Children who may or may not have eaten breakfast, children who may not have had supper the night before. Children we've come to know as 'school dependent.' They depend on us for many of their basic needs that their families are sometimes not able to afford.

I wanted more than anything to do my job well. The message I continually received from my employer was that good teaching meant that I was spending more time documenting than creating a healthy and happy learning environment. I had been teaching for over 10 years by then, I had become a very good classroom manager, a disciplinarian, I could create a paper trail that would pave the highways from one end of this province to another. I was getting very good at all of the things that didn't matter in the daily life of children's learning. What teachers notice from their early years onward is that there really is nowhere to turn for help within our current system. Even that union counsellor didn't have much to tell me other than I wasn't alone; that hundreds of teachers were contacting them with the same concerns.

During that time, I recall a parent meeting with Michael's parents who asked me how he was doing. Michael was getting C's on his report card in reading and writing. I tried to tell them all of the answers I knew my employer wanted them to hear. That Michael was participating well in class, that I was implementing the strategies that were asked of me by the department and the board, that I could give him some extra help at lunch or after school... But in my head I was thinking, 'If parents only knew... If parents only knew that getting a C on report card means you are failing. That getting a C means I can't find the time to help him. Getting a C means they will likely have to pay for a tutor. Getting a C means he is in the bottom of the middle third; not meeting the arbitrary standard yet, not struggling enough to get additional support.'

I couldn't tell them that in an era of standards-based education and teacher accountability I was by all accounts failing their son but really the system I was working in was failing me. That more often than not all of the money spent in education on research and committees and studies really goes to telling us what we already know. Every staff meeting and every inservice my colleagues and I attended we were told of more tasks that needed to be done that some outside expert had determined would improve our classrooms. There was no additional funding and no additional resources. There was no where to turn because if you told anyone it was impossible to do your job you would be reprimanded or even worse given a coach to chew up even more of time. Questioning or resisting the expected processes and procedures would be interpreted by our superiors as more evidence of our reluctance to change. What teachers have been asking for over these decades is to have their voice valued. To be treated as professionals whose experience has given them insights on how to make things better. Instead we have a top-down system that follows a military model where information flows in one direction only from

people who haven't been in the classroom in years. This is why **this** opportunity is so important to our system.

The opportunity to be heard in a democratic process allows our students and young teachers to see that sometimes one voice can make a difference. Now, thanks to this process, parents are hearing about the obstacles. I hope they remain patient through this challenging time as teachers try to leverage this one golden opportunity that we've had in decades to truly make meaningful change.

This is not really about the service award. This is not about pay or time off. This is about a process that harms already damaged relationships. I believe in public education. I believe in inclusion- as it was intended, not as it has become. I believe positive change is possible. I believe things could improve if the political will and leadership is willing to shift from a divisive top-down approach to a more authentically inclusive and collaborative model.

Defeating this bill would send the message to this next generation of students and teachers that you are willing to stand with them to change this trend in education. Please don't miss this opportunity to connect with this new generation of teachers to support and nurture a healthier work and learning environment than what was afforded teachers in my demographic. Ten years later, I stand here with my young colleagues, proud of their courage to say, "No," and I implore this committee to do likewise.

Once again I thank you for the opportunity. This is a tipping point in education and we are leaving it now in your hands.

Sincerely,

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