

Good afternoon to all.

Jane Warren

- Bd. member of DAWN Canada

(of 4)

former president of BIANs, former ~~natl.~~ natl. treasurer of BIAC.

DPC member

Thank you for permitting me to speak this afternoon. And thank you for this Accessibility Act.

It has been a long time coming but it is planting seeds of hope, of possibility for the population of Nova Scotia.

Different kinds of seeds:

Physical seeds - of exercise and nutrition.

Emotional seeds - of staying positive about the future.

Social seeds - that it works for all.

Money seeds - of everyone making enough to eat, or at least not having to beg for food.

And a seed of Spirituality - abolishing the words "I can't", and with a dream honoured by action. Which in turn will teach future Nova Scotians by example.

Those poetic words were spoken by Terry Kelly in November 2010 when speaking at a public Kings County Discrimination - Race Relations Committee meeting. The committee was to make Kings County discrimination free.

And that is what inaccessibility is ... discrimination.

However, accessibility for all is not a ^{primary} priority for the DofJ.

Just because the Justice Minister of the moment believes it to be very important - with all due respect to Minister Whalen, another Justice Minister with or without a different government may not be so inclined.

My objection to the DofJ taking responsibility for the Accessibility Act is that to my understanding the DofJ is already a full time job (and probably more than full time for a number of its personnel). With the addition of the Accessibility Act (its regulations which have not been written yet; AND its enforcement) that will be adding another more-than full-time job into the mix.

Given the choice between fighting an influx of fentanyl or ensuring compliance with Nova Scotia's new Accessibility Act, I would hazard that the Accessibility Act has to wait.

For this new legislation to be successful – the support, commitment and participation of all Nova Scotians is required. Changing the current attitudes and increasing public awareness requires education of the masses and broad exposure so people will be convinced to do what is right and not just because “it is the law”.

There are no time lines for the achievement of any of the accessibility measures outlined in the act. Specifically, Education Accessibility Standards; Customer Service Accessibility Standards; Health Care Accessibility Standards; an Accessibility Standard for the built environment; Transportation Standards; Employability Accessibility Standards, as well as Information and Communication.

All of these accessibility standards should ensure that needed accessibility and accommodations are provided to people with disabilities (PWD) of all kinds, including (but not limited to) those labelled with

intellectual, learning, mental health, communication, cognitive or mobility disabilities, as well as vision or hearing loss.

The committee tasked with the development of each standard should be independent of the Nova Scotia government. And each standard needs to be widely publicized and enforced.

Both the Human Rights Commission as well as the Disabled Persons Commission (and/or whatever follows it) should be extensively involved from the beginning, in both the formal and informal standards development. *Not the Public Utility Board.*

Each of these Commissions has experience with the disability community, however the Disabled Persons Commission and its members constitute a broader and deeper depository of disability knowledge from across the province. And moving forward, this resource should continue to be maintained / used. *Not the Public Utility Board.*

The offspring of the Disabled Persons Commission – the Accessibility Directorate? – needs to be properly resourced. As the Commission itself has never been.

Twenty percent of the population of this province deserves to be treated fully and fairly. It will not just be the twenty percent whose Accessibility Dream is shattered ... their family and friends will be disappointed as well.

As Kevin Murphy said - a place that is not accessible for him to go to, shop in, recreate in, live in, etc. does not just lose his business. It loses his family's and friend's business as well. And to an extent that of his friends' friends.

Nova Scotia needs a stand-alone accessibility minister. A minister with other onerous duties (such as the DofJ or Community Services) will not and cannot give accessibility any more than 'good-will' attention.

The change from Community Services to Justice is well-intentioned but the Minister of Justice cannot devote anywhere near the time required for developing, overseeing and enforcing full accessibility in all aspects of the lives of Nova Scotians.

As well, the assignment of accessibility duties to the DofJ puts the Minister in a conflict – that of having to enforce the Access. Act of Nova Scotia against government organizations, of which DofJ is one. This puts the Minister in the position of being both the enforcer and the defendant.

To prevent this – and to give the appearance of prevention – the Access. Act of Nova Scotia should be assigned to an arm's length enforcement by an independent agency. That is a Secretariat or a Commission. *at the very least.*

