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**From:** Marilyn More [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, March 05, 2018 1:16 PM  
**To:** Office of the Legislative Counsel  
**Subject:** Written submission to Law Amendments Committee

Monday, March 5th, 2018

To the Chair and Members of the Law Amendments Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on one aspect of Bill 72 and make a plea to save the elected regional school boards.

I want to outline my experience so you can better understand my perspective and rationale.

I was the first woman elected to a school board in NS - back in 1978. I was a young mom running a citywide campaign across the former City of Dartmouth where the initial school board election was held; came second in total votes to Dr John Savage, later Premier of this province. I served three terms over ten years, chairing the Board for much of that time.

I currently have two grandchildren in public school in NS.

I have been involved with school boards in NS from almost every perspective you can imagine as well as locally, provincially and nationally. My experience included student, parent, teacher for two years - therefore a former member of the NSTU, married to a teacher for 30 years, home and school member, executive member of the NS School Boards Association, ten years MLA, Minister of Education for a year and a half, Minister of Advanced Education for four years. I was honored to chair the Council of Ministers of Education Canada meeting in Iqaluit in 2013 before I retired.

I have seen the best and worst school boards have to offer on many fronts. And I fully endorse this model of public education governance. Like other levels of responsible and representative government, school boards are evolving and need to be supported.

I attended board meetings regularly for 15 years - five as an observer, ten as a board member. I understand tough decision-making and due process. Twice - once as a citizen, once as MLA - I served on committees working to keep a local school open (successfully I might add). As a Board we kept open or closed a number of schools after extensive consultation and study. I value evidence-based decision-making and public input. But I also fear rushing to decisions without careful consideration of the impacts.

I fully appreciate the need for checks and balances that school boards offer. Eliminating seven of the eight elected school boards in NS is misguided from my point of view and fraught with unintended consequences.

When I claim that elected school boards provide the checks and balances to ensure and protect quality education for our children and grandchildren, I know what I am talking about. I have seen political manipulation of processes, policies and results affecting education throughout my lifetime. In fact, I once resigned as Board chair along with my vice chair - Dr John Savage - to protest provincial government interference during one school closure.

So I ask you - why is an entire level of democracy being eliminated in Bill 72 without proven evidence that it is not working, but especially without genuine efforts to improve perceived weaknesses? Is this due process? Where's the consideration of the consequences - both intended and unintended? How will our rights as citizens be protected?

Others have well-described the loss of local input and representation, especially African-Nova Scotians, Mi'kmaq and female citizens and I totally agree.

Are you as MLAs ready for the post-school board era? Parents and guardians have had 40 years of partially and fully elected school boards to provide local access to decision-makers and public decision-making with all that entails. They will expect the same availability and accountability from their provincial representatives.

The Premier and Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development talk about a direct line between the Education Deputy and schools improving student success. Teaching and learning is a complex 24/7 interaction that is year-long and life-long. While formal education plays an important role for sure, so do other key factors - parenting, income, health status, family and community supports, personal interests and motivation and many other determinants.

Eliminating the seven English language regional school boards will place the Education Department and provincial government directly responsible for "student success" in this province. Or at least for the 96% of Nova Scotians without elected boards. Does the provincial government really want to be considered the sole reason your child is doing well or not?

What's to prevent political patronage and for-profit interests from surfacing in educational decisions? Will schools in areas represented by government MLA's be favored? Who will balance resources & public input for schools with less active parents and fundraising capacity? Who will set school boundaries and choice of school policies? Will communities that have developed and paid for enhanced programming and services be able to continue those priorities?

Have you considered how schools will be closed, teachers and support staff hired, funding distributed in a future without elected regional school boards?

These are very emotional and contentious issues - is this where your time and focus is best spent at the provincial level? Is this your area of expertise?

The "elephant in the room" is rarely mentioned - educational funding from provincial and municipal levels (including the extra \$15 million discretionary funding from HRM). One would expect adequate, long-term funding would also be key to student success.

Bill 72 promoters say they want students to have equality of programming and achievement. This raises spectres of levelling programs and services province-wide. Some areas would lose their priorities; Metro Halifax would lose heavily.

Because where is the money going to come from? Boards, therefore regions, are at different stages re rationalizing space with declining enrollment or shifting populations, school closures, deferred maintenance, courtesy bussing, program choice such as International Baccalaureate, language instruction, arts, alternative programs, health clinics, services for immigrant and minority populations, etc in addition to services for children with disabilities and special needs. How will this be "rationalized" across the province!!!

It's clear that the widely anticipated inclusion report will have financial implications and rightly so. What is less clear is why government believes taking "direct" control of schools is necessary before those recommendations are released publicly.

Too many questions + too few answers = rocky road for students, teachers and parents ahead.

Here is the lesson I've learned over many years and through varied experiences - school boards, students, teachers and parents need supports, resources and respectful collaboration among stakeholders to be even more effective. Good people are working tirelessly and unselfishly to improve life, especially educational opportunities, in this province. Can we not work together to maximize their efforts!

I wish to repeat - elected school boards provide essential checks and balances to protect democratic rights, local access to decision makers & transparency behind how decisions get made and why.

I implore you to re-consider Bill 72 - for the sake of our children and to respect the democratic rights of Nova Scotians - thank you.

Marilyn More  
Dartmouth

Sent from my Samsung device over Bell's LTE network.