



Notes for a Submission

By

Jason MacLean
President

Nova Scotia Government & General Employees Union

To the Law Amendments Committee
On Bill No. 121

Nursing Act
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Introduction

Good afternoon.

Madame/Mr. Chairperson and members of the Committee - thank you for allowing me to speak to you today about Bill 1217 – the Nursing Act.

My name is Jason MacLean and I am President of NSGEU.

The Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU) is the largest union in the province representing approximately 31,000 workers across the public sector in the provincial government, corrections, public schools, community colleges, universities, municipalities, community organizations and of course health care.

The NSGEU represents over 3,500 Licensed Practical Nurses, Nurse Practitioners and Registered Nurses. The care, support and professionalism of these dedicated people is crucial to the performance of the health care system.

On behalf of our members I would like to thank Government, the College of Licensed Practical Nurses and College of Registered Nurses for allowing us to provide input into this piece of legislation.

Sue Smith, as Transition Executive Director for both colleges deserves much credit for showing key leadership throughout this process.

I am pleased to note that most of the input and feedback we provided in the drafting of this legislation was incorporated in some fashion. It is our position that legislation greatly benefits from getting and incorporating input from those it will most impact.

It is a process that should be followed in all circumstances.

Meaningful consultation makes for better, more thoughtful, legislation.

As good as this legislation is in its intent, the current version before the legislature does leave room for improvements.

The NSGEU would suggest that the newly formed College should be able to take on systemic complaints about key issues, such as chronic nurse understaffing.

There is currently no mechanism for this and consequently it leaves individual nurses vulnerable or liable should something happen like providing a patient with the wrong medication.

We recently surveyed our nurses and 93 per cent said they believe patients are at risk due to nurse shortages.

Our nurses have provided a clear message – the system is in crisis.

Now I understand that there are some MLAs on this committee and in government who refuse to acknowledge the crisis exists. Those are the

ones right now preparing their talking points and key messages provided by their communications staff.

Those people wish to parse words and talk about challenges in the system and point to investments, good investments in infrastructure, that have zero impact to the senior who needs a long term care bed today.

Or the person who was sick enough to need an ambulance ride to the hospital only to be left in the hallway for up to 15 hours or more.

Or the nurse who tells us that it's only a matter of time before working short is going to result in an unnecessary death.

To cut through the political wordsmithing I looked up the definition of crisis. It is defined as – ***A time of intense difficulty or danger. A time when a difficult or important decision must be made.***

I can think of no better description of the current situation facing our health care workers, nurses and patients.

Our nurses routinely report to us, shift after shift, day after day, week after week of the intense difficulty and danger they, their colleagues, and their patients face due to the lack of working nurses.

I use the term working nurses as government likes to quote numbers of licensed nurses in the province, that while a compelling number does not tell the true story.

Licensed nurses does not mean they are actively working in a unit or on a floor in a hospital currently experiencing a nurse shortage.

In fact, I would ask the NSHA or Department of Health to release the number of nurses actively working in the Halifax Infirmary Emergency Department.

I believe it would tell a different story from the talking points and would allow for honest debate and discussion on possible solutions.

The Nursing Act and the newly formed College has a responsibility to act on this crisis and advocate for its new members. Many nurses are fearful that the current situation is putting their license at-risk.

This new legislation empowers the College to:

- Serve and protect the public interest in the practice of the profession;
- Subject to public interest, preserve the integrity of the profession; and
- Maintain the public and registrants confidence in the ability of the College to regulate the profession.

The NSGEU will strongly advocate, on behalf of our nurses, that the newly formed College must take action as both the public and the practice of the nursing profession are at risk.

As this government continues to disrespect nurses and reinterprets what it means to work overtime it only serves to force nurses out of Nova Scotia.

Young nurses are already feeling burned out. The current system is built on overtime – in 2018 more than \$19 – million dollars was spent on registered nurse overtime. That is \$15 – million dollars more than budgeted.

That same year nearly \$3 – million was spent on overtime for L-P-Ns, when only \$500-thousand was budgeted.

This has been a consistent trend since 2016.

Now the government, who oversees the NSHA, has made a bad situation worse.

By definition, a crisis requires difficult decisions be made. It is time for this government to start making decisions that will have positive impacts today.

The Nursing Act is a positive piece of legislation. But it is not a solution to what nurses and patients are experiencing every day.

It's time to put the talking points away and start to address the crisis in health care.

On behalf of our 3500 nurses, we appreciate this opportunity to speak with you, and I welcome your questions or comments.