

Good Evening Law Amendments

My name is Patrick Sullivan. I am the President and CEO of the Halifax Chamber of Commerce. I would first like to thank you for the chance to speak tonight. The Halifax Chamber of Commerce is a membership-based organization of over 1,700 companies that employ over 65,000 employees in the greater Halifax area.

Our concerns with this legislation are threefold;

- That the Halifax Regional Municipality (Halifax), with currently 47% of Nova Scotia's population, should be effectively represented. Considering its population numbers and growth projections to Halifax is underrepresented and does not have appropriate voter parity.
- That representation for African Nova Scotian's and Acadian's be entrenched in the current 51 MLA's.
- The number of current Nova Scotian MLA's (51) should not increase, in fact, should decrease to reflect the economic realities of our province today and in the future.

My points today will address these issues.

According to the 2018 Fiscal Framework presented to Halifax Council from City staff, Halifax will reach 50% of Nova Scotia's population by 2022. If Halifax was to be effectively represented, based on population, we should currently see 25 – 26 MLA's, but we currently only have 22. This is not voter parity. In fact, following the population estimates, if the commission increases the number of MLA's from 51 to 55 then our representation should be 27 plus MLA's.

It is our belief that the commission must face the demographic realities of Nova Scotia and the projected future of Nova Scotia for the coming years. By 2022 Halifax will require 5 new MLA's to meet the population target by riding. Halifax is growing. Not only that but when we look at population growth in Nova Scotia to twelve months ending June 30th 2018, we see that Halifax is the only area that is growing at a significant rate. The province of Nova Scotia had a population increase of 0.55%, provincially driven by an increase of 1.59% for Halifax and of the 18 counties measured in this study, twelve of them have had a decline in population in the last twelve months. Halifax is the only area really growing and it is growing for two reasons:

- If we look at immigration, 3,717 immigrants came to Halifax and 589 went to all other areas of the province.
- If we look at births versus deaths, Halifax had a net 825 births and all other counties in Nova Scotia had a combined 1,793 deaths versus births for net decline in organic growth.

Halifax is the economic growth generator of the province, providing 56% of GDP, and 51% of our major projects spending. We are advocates for voter parity and we do not want to see our members across Halifax (and Nova Scotia) feel that they are underrepresented because of their district size and/or voter ratio.

The Halifax Chamber and its members are in full support of providing cultural and linguistic representation for African Nova Scotians and Acadians across our province. We feel that these groups can be incorporated without additional MLA's either through the redistribution of current representation and/or through general representation. We did not feel it was our place as the Halifax Chamber to provide specific guidance on ridings and which ridings should be placed where however, given the proposals provided by the commission, we feel we must comment.

We believe that recognition of the cultural significance and contribution of these communities is broader and should be ingrained in within the broader culture of government and by all MLAs rather than expecting specific MLAs to represent these groups.

We were quite surprised to see such a simplistic solution developed by the commission with the additional seats in underpopulated areas and to return to essentially the protected ridings. Providing seats for Nova Scotians that represent an average 7,000 electors disenfranchises the voters in average ridings. In addition, if there is real concern about Acadian voices in the legislature then why have almost 12,000 French first language speakers in HRM been neglected?

We still believe that the MLAs in the province should not exceed 51 seats, but if we must increase seats when reviewing the Electoral maps included in the Commission's report, and we fully acknowledge we are in no way experts, it seems that areas in Cape Breton and Southwest Nova could be easily combined while still respecting voter parity. Specifically, the additional ridings considered in the southwest of Clare and Argyle could be combined to provide the requested Acadian riding around Yarmouth and total approximately 13,000 electors in a non-contiguous riding. The riding of Richmond and Guysborough could also be combined in some way to reduce the number of additional seats.

As suggested their will now be at least 3 ridings that will be well less than 60% of the average riding. All of these ridings are deemed exceptional. In other words, 5% of the ridings in Nova Scotia are exceptional. This seems to completely disregard the guidance the Supreme Court has provided in the past in the Carter decision.

In summary, we are very concerned with the commissions proposed riding additions for many reasons:

- Halifax is currently underrepresented in the provincial legislature and these proposals will not improve this representation today and will see it continue to get worse in the future.
- This proposal is built for the past not the future of Nova Scotia with an increasingly urban population which includes both African nova Scotian and Acadian populations.

Adding additional ridings in areas that have a significantly lower population of electors harms the electors in other ridings. To quote the Supreme Court of Canada's 1991 case *Reference re Prov. Electoral Boundaries (Sask.)*: "Effective representation" entails "relative parity of voting power": "A system which dilutes one citizen's vote unduly as compared with another citizen's vote runs the risk of providing inadequate representation to the citizen whose vote is diluted." Where the unequal weighting of votes is not required to ensure better government, "dilution of one citizen's vote as compared with another's should not be countenanced."

If the commission insists on additional seats, 3 additional seats are not necessary.

Cost of additional seats has not been seemingly considered in the report. There may be a belief that taxpayers funds are limitless, but adding additional seats have costs today and in the future. Our estimate for four new seats is an additional \$1 Million dollars per year to the Nova Scotia budget for what additional benefit?

The suggestions provided by the Commission are not forward-looking, but rather looking to the past for today's answers. We strongly encourage the committee to recognize the amendments proposed does not recognize the realities of the population of Nova Scotia today or in the future. The reason this commission was called was because of successful legal challenges. My fear is that further legal challenges are coming if voters are disenfranchised in this area. "dilution of one citizen's vote as compared with another's should not be countenanced."

As you evaluate this, I will tell you the chamber asked our members at a luncheon for the premier in February we tested the question of what the electoral boundary commission should recommend for seats in the legislature. Of 399 respondents, 35% felt the seats should remain the same and 48% believed there should be less MLA's. That is 83% of respondents felt there should be less or the same number of MLA's.

Thank you again and I hope you will take time to reflect on our words.