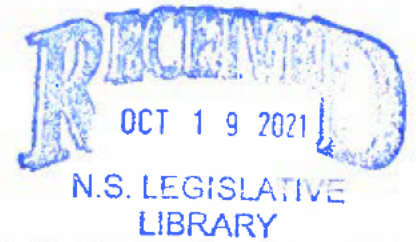


From: Merydie Ross [REDACTED]
Sent: October 18, 2021 5:17 PM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: Bill 1 - Law Amendments Committee Submission



**** EXTERNAL EMAIL / COURRIEL EXTERNE ****

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To the Law Amendments Committee,

I disagree with Bill 1 and its proposed fixed election date of the third Tuesday in July. As a candidate in our recent summer election, I feel strongly that we experienced low voter engagement due to the election taking place during the summer. While knocking on doors and in other voter engagement activities, we were frequently informed that voters were away on vacation, not home because they were at their cottage or at the beach, or were not even in the riding for part, most, or all of the election. Volunteer availability was constrained by vacation plans and other seasonal commitments, which impacted our capacity to connect with more voters. And perhaps worst of all, myself, volunteers, and students lamented the fact that we lost many opportunities to engage with students that would otherwise have been available in some form, had the election taken place during the school year.

With summer elections, there is no opportunity for candidates to visit schools and classrooms, or for schools to host candidate debates. There are no student groups or other opportunities for post-secondary institutions (such as our local NSCC Lunenburg Campus) to help structure pathways and disseminate information for newly eligible student voters to learn how, when, and where to vote, and to have fun voting for the first time with their friends. In contrast with my own experiences of other elections taking place during the school year, I feel that summer elections squander the opportunity to engage and cultivate new generations of voters in learning and practicing healthy voting habits at a young age.

While in high school at Park View Education Centre, I recall our school hosted a candidates debate between local candidates for MLA in the 2006 provincial election. This made forming an opinion as a young person on who I and my peers would like to vote for, had we been of the voting age, exciting and dynamic. Consequently, so too did speculating about who would win the election and how the election results would impact our soon to be post-grad future. In university, I volunteered on campus with my friends and a student group, as well as at the local campaign office, and with much excitement, attended on campus candidate events. On election day, I carpooled with my friends to vote for the first time, making election day a thrilling and celebratory occasion. In a previous fall provincial election in Nova Scotia, I was one of the volunteers at the campaign office to orient a class of elementary students to our campaign. The class had walked from their school to our headquarters, then proceeded to walk to and visit with the other candidate's offices, before walking back to school and holding their own mock election, voting for the candidates on the local ballot. To this day, I too, remember voting in a mock election in elementary school, which reflected the election of the day. I feel these experiences have helped shape me into the person I am today and helped inform my belief in the importance of voting and participating in democracy, and none of these fun and valuable learning experiences would have happened during a summer election.

While this bill and the comments made last week in the Legislature by Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, The Honourable Becky Druhan seem to indicate that she feels Nova Scotia's students receive enough civics education without elections taking place during the school year, I disagree. Based on my own experiences as a student, campaign volunteer, and candidate, I believe that for students, nothing brings democracy to life more than learning from and participating in the real life events unfolding day to day in the world around us. We need fixed elections in Nova Scotia, but I feel that Bill 1 does not appropriately address the democracy deficit in our province, and

that holding elections in July will not increase turnout amongst young voters, families, and first time voters. With the last two provincial elections having reached historic lows in voter turnout, I believe that this bill ultimately does a disservice to voters by further disenfranchising an already disengaged population. Nova Scotians deserve to have a fixed election date that supports strong voter turnout by all demographics in our diverse population.

Thank you for your time and consideration on my behalf.

Most sincerely,

Merydie

Merydie Ross
(she/her)