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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: April 11, 2022 6:11 PM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: Regarding Bill 149

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

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Sir or Madam,

In 2003, while exploring retirement options, my husband and I came to Nova Scotia on vacation. Within hours of landing in Halifax, my husband knew we had found the place where we were meant to be. I soon found myself sharing his assessment. We were not real estate speculators or investors, nor were we looking for a place to shelter funds outside of our home country. We were an ordinary couple who were approaching retirement and were trying to decide where to spend our "golden years." We loved everything about Nova Scotia: the warmth of the people, the culture, the natural beauty, and the many close associations with our native New England. Seventy-two hours after arriving, we walked into a real estate office in Lunenburg and, by the end of that day, we found a piece of land on which to build our retirement dream home. Note that, at that time, land for sale was abundant and often languished on the market for years. We did not take any housing off the market, and our decision provided income to the seller and a commission to our Realtor thereby benefiting the local economy.

We both had ongoing careers in the States that could not be conducted remotely so we did not build immediately. Throughout the ensuing years, we visited Nova Scotia two or three times each year. During each visit we spent money on hotels, food, entertainment, car rentals and more - again, each time benefiting the local economy.

In 2008, when home sales and construction were still extremely slow, and although we were both still working, we decided that the time had come to build our home. We hired a local contractor, thus providing much needed employment for carpenters, painters, electricians, plumbers, landscapers, and many, many more local tradespeople. By Christmas of that year, our home was completed. We bought furniture and household goods and, although our time away from work was still limited, we spent as much time as possible in Nova Scotia.

We retired in 2017, and since then we have resided in our home for 5-6 months a year, the maximum allowed to us by the federal government. Our home is neither vacant nor under utilized. We support local arts, dine in local restaurants, continue to employ local tradespeople to help maintain and improve our home and land, shop in local businesses, and host friends and family whose visits also support the local economy. We continually sing the praises of Nova Scotia to anyone who will listen and they, along with visiting family and friends, have recommended the province as a vacation destination to their friends.

Through all these years, we paid property taxes and the economy of Nova Scotia has benefited from our presence by way of both the taxes paid and discretionary spending despite the fact that we are only allowed to live in our home for 6 months of the year. Our home is on a private road which the province neither built, maintains, nor even plows. Our trash is collected seasonally even though we and others (including full time Nova Scotians) are often in residence off season. We do not have children in the schools. We have never called upon the police or fire departments. When we use the medical system, which has happened only once in all these years, we pay the full costs in cash. We do not use any other social services. In other words, we are not a burden on the province and do not use most provincial services.

Despite this, we are now faced with a surcharge to our property taxes that, if my math is correct, would triple our taxes. Why? We understand that Nova Scotia is facing a housing shortage and affordability crisis. Nevertheless, imposing confiscatory taxes on people who were welcomed by the province, purchased or built their homes in good faith, who love and are ambassadors for the province, who did not purchase as investors but as residents, who are often living in their homes for the maximum time allowed to them, and who are contributing to the local economy will not solve either problem.

Almost 50% of our village is composed of non-Nova Scotians - property tax payers all. Consider what could happen if this short-sighted, punitive, confiscatory tax is enacted.

Most of the non-Nova Scotian residents are retirees who budgeted their fixed retirement incomes to pay anticipated property taxes and other routine expenses. Faced with an exorbitant surcharge/increase, many may choose to or be forced to sell. This will create a glut of homes on the market and may drive down prices and increase inventory in the short term. However, these impacts will be felt through the whole community and will impact Nova Scotian residents along with the targeted non-Nova Scotian residents. Will Nova Scotians be pleased to see the equity in their homes -

often their largest assets - disappear? These lower values will, in turn, drive down assessments and thus the property taxes collected, creating little, if any, net gain to the province. In addition, the reduction in property values will hit hardest in rural areas, like Kingsburg, which are beyond commuting range to Halifax and where there are few job opportunities, making it unlikely that Nova Scotians will rush in to snap up these newly available properties despite the lowered prices thereby setting off a downward spiral that will further reduce values in the long run especially in rural areas.

The press has extensively covered housing availability and affordability issues in Toronto and Vancouver, both of which enacted tax surcharges on non-resident owners years ago. Those surcharges, however, have done nothing to increase availability or affordability in either of those cities. Further, the rationales behind those urban surcharges do not translate to conditions in Nova Scotia or the real causes of the availability and affordability crisis in the province - and certainly not in the rural areas favored by non-Nova Scotian retirees and owners of vacation homes. The most effective way to address those issues isn't to drive people from their homes. Rather, as professor Murtaza Haider of Ryerson University recently told CBC, it is by building more homes to satisfy the need: "If we don't address the real problem, that is construction of new housing, and we continue to build or under build. . . .then the problem will remain."

History has shown us that it is easy to blame and target "The Other" who can't vote with the intent of forcing them from their homes and the communities which they love, and to which they have contributed, Is that the moral road Nova Scotia wants to go down? The short-sighted, punitive and confiscatory tax surcharge will do nothing to solve the housing problem as shown elsewhere in Canada. At the same time, the unintended consequences could cause long term damage to Nova Scotia's real estate values (especially in rural areas) and hospitality and tourism sectors. Most tragically, Nova Scotia's reputation as a welcoming province could be devastated as word of forced sales and shattered dreams spreads throughout Canada, the US and the rest of the world.

Vivian Lyons