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From: kim.gillies kim.gillies [REDACTED]
Sent: April 14, 2022 12:29 AM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel; Smith-McCrossin, Elizabeth
Subject: Non-Resident Property Tax letter
Attachments: Non Resident Property Tax.docx

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Please accept the attached letter as a formal presentation for consideration by the Law Amendments Committee.

Respectfully,

Kimberly Gillies

Oakville, Ontario

Re: Comments re Non-Resident Property Tax to support new housing in Nova Scotia

04/13/22

To: Law Amendments Committee

Until last week any mention of the term 'Come From Away' made me smile and brought an immediate sense of warmth and pride about being a Maritimer, ready to welcome people with open arms no matter where you are from. While this has been a popular Newfoundland story, this charm includes the Maritime provinces and I have always believed it to be its greatest asset, even above the physical beauty. It is not until the last few days that I have discovered that I am actually included in this CFA term.

I have now lived in Ontario for most of my adult life, having moved here in 1985 due to the scarcity of jobs (and for a lad that I met at Acadia & later married). My response to anyone who has ever asked me where I am from is met with "I'm from Nova Scotia, but I live in Ontario". That is a common response for anyone who has deep roots in our beautiful province but has moved away. Until Covid I had not missed a summer coming home (YES, despite raising my own children in Ontario a visit to NS is simply known as 'coming home'). And for any of my friends Nova Scotia is the one destination that I have endorsed my entire life, as it is a place that I have always been proud to share with others not from here.

There are apparently 27,000 non-resident Nova Scotians – shall we label them NRNS's, or CFA's, or just call us 'low hanging fruit', ready to be picked every year to generate easy tax revenue? Many flock to Nova Scotia every summer like homing pigeons, the same way that many Nova Scotian snowbirds flock to warm destinations in the winter. Imagine the shock for many snowbirds that without warning, there is now a new tax assessed so high that they may have to sell their property and give up their retirement dreams. Many who do this aren't necessarily wealthy, and would have planned their retirement very carefully to be able to spend a few months in a warmer climate. No matter where any Nova Scotian or non-resident chooses to spend their recreational dollars it generates revenue, and in our case it will generate it in support of rural Nova Scotia. A great deal of those who come here from out of province and spend several months in the summer are also merely reconnecting with family. The emotional benefit of this for families is priceless, however the economic gain is indeed measurable.

I appreciate that the view of Nova Scotians varies depending on your own situation. If you are fortunate to have all of your children reside in the NS or the Maritimes your view may be different than the mom who has had children move away for jobs and never permanently return, always with the hope that one day they will. It is also different if you are not currently a property owner, or are struggling to find affordable rent. Unfortunately these are the same issues affecting young people and families in Ontario & the rest of the country. A direct quote from your finance minister states that "this new tax targeting non-resident property owners is necessary to help Nova Scotians gain access to housing at a time when vacancy rates are extremely low". If it is viewed by the NS government that me being a seasonal property owner in rural NS contributes to this housing problem, then logically every NS resident who currently has a cottage or second home somewhere in NS that is not being used for 12 months of the year is also guilty of the same and should be at least contributing some extra property tax if they are part of the problem. I dare to say that this would be met with more than a little opposition from voters!

We were thrilled last fall when we were unexpectedly able to purchase a parcel of undeveloped land close to my mom and other family, with the intent of building a cottage and eventually divide our time between provinces. This would allow us to still keep our connection with our grown children (and eventual possible grandkids) in Ontario in the winter months. In December (having no knowledge of this new tax) we hired a really nice builder who also has a young family. We have asked that any additional tradesman be from the local area, and source as many materials as possible from the same. It will potentially be our home for 5 months of the year, and we want to be respectful and help the community in any way that we can. Seasonal residents can contribute so much economic prosperity and other intangible benefits to smaller communities, even if it is annoying for full time residents when the local grocery store becomes so crowded in these months!

In addition to family ties here, we also have a unique situation. To be clear I am not looking for sympathy, but merely a logical view of our case. My husband has cancer, and we are very lucky to be in the care of an amazing oncology team in Toronto, at a time when healthcare in every province is being pushed to the limit. Becoming a resident of NS full time and foregoing our current health coverage doesn't seem to make sense for us or for NS. There are many in NS who believe that we should not be entitled to healthcare that we haven't paid into. I agree – let us keep our out of province residency so that we don't become a burden on your healthcare as we age. Don't force us into becoming a NS resident by taxing us excessively if we don't. I cannot fathom why the QEII would want another cancer patient that is already being cared for elsewhere, or why NS would like us to take up additional spots here one day in your long term care facilities. If you currently require healthcare in NS aren't you glad that we won't be adding to surgery wait times and the financial burden to your healthcare system?

I have no objection to a property surcharge for out of province residents if you think that we are not contributing enough financially through our upcoming build, and money that will be spent in subsequent year living here in NS for extended periods. PEI has done just that, and while non residents may not be happy with it is at least reasonable. It is the obscene rate of the NS surcharge and the urgency to implement this tax without warning to non-residents (including the rush to even write this letter after finding out about the hearing last night) that is my concern. Again I am clearly not looking for sympathy, but I am asking that the Nova Scotian government treat those that it was desperately courting to come not so long ago to be treated with a little more equity when we can only help, not hurt the economy of rural areas.

There has to be some compromise with the reduction of rates for non residents who are already property owners at April 1, or at least reductions for those who are 'permanent part-time', costing the province nothing and reaping the benefits of spending dollars. A government cannot blindside its non-residents with such a huge expense, particularly when property taxes are already increased due to changing assessments already – you are double dipping, and then dipping again. The options that could allow a non-resident to be exempt do nothing for the average non-resident who is not speculating on property values. Nor does it help the housing shortage in the urban areas as it is the short supply in these areas that is making living there unaffordable.

I do apologize that this has been lengthy, but it is very hurtful to be treated as if you are foreigners in your own country. It felt like we were true outsiders during Covid protocols when anyone residing outside of NS (and later the Maritime bubble) were not welcome, and actual 'borders' were somehow

introduced within our country. However hard that was to endure, being Canadian we accepted that these borders were necessary for the protection of all NS residents (including our own families), and the medical system could not handle an influx of new hospital patients if numbers were to increase drastically. Though I didn't see my family for almost 2 years I have a great deal of respect for how Dr Strang managed the crisis, and I watched his public addresses often. However now I feel like I am being unfairly targeted in this quest for tax dollars from someone who can't vote.

Coincidentally the news broke about this unexpected new tax on the very day that our builder submitted our building permit application. Had we been aware of this additional surcharge a few months ago we quite likely would have delayed any build until we at least knew what kind of yearly costs we could be anticipate. But being Nova Scotian AND Canadian we would never go back on our commitments to the people who are counting on our project to start two months after this tax is to become effective. We just have to believe that there is yet to be more thoughtful conversations about the final implementation and rate of this unfair surcharge.

The famous Nova Scotia ballad 'Farewell to Nova Scotia' could very well be back in the charts figuratively and literally over the next few years as no one will be able to afford to live there if they are a Come From Away. So sad when all we and many others have wanted to do is to finally come home for more than a short family vacation.

Respectfully,

You can take the girl from the Maritimes, but you can't take the Maritimes from the girl

Kim Gillies