

NSGEU

A submission by Nova Scotia Government
and General Employees Union

Regarding Bill 334:
Health Services and Insurance Act

October 28, 2023

Good afternoon,

I'm Sandra Mullen, President of the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union and I return today to speak on Bill 334 the Health Services and Insurance Act.

The objective of this bill is a good one, providing universal mental health and addictions care to people in need.

It has long been agreed that mental health is health care, as is care for people who struggle with addictions.

The NSGEU supports universal, publicly funded health care.

But with all recent legislation from this government, it lacks any kind of consultation or outreach to those it most impacts. And while it might tick the box of an election promise there are some concerns that should be debated and considered before this moves forward.

The current government seems driven to amalgamate as much power within the hands of the Premier and cabinet ministers, while reducing the important role the legislature and all its elected members should have in governing the province.

This bill even takes this one step further by removing the need to consult cabinet and place the full authority into the hands of the minister responsible.

As they say, power corrupts – absolute power, corrupts absolutely.

Facing the scrutiny of the opposition in the legislature is not the nuisance the government makes it out to be. It's an important part of the democratic process and should be respected – and that means listening to those with opposing views.

While paying private sector providers is nothing new there is a deeper question that should be contemplated here.

Wouldn't it more beneficial to Nova Scotians over the longer term to have a strong, professional, robust public service that is able to provide this universal coverage?

This might be a good short-term solution, but where is the longer-term vision for mental health and addictions?

This bill will increase the use of private sector resources in our health care system. The bill doesn't hide that fact.

We know people want and need these services now.

But government must have a longer view of what is in the best interest of people years and decades down the road. This bill provides a path towards Public Private Partnerships in mental health and addictions.

Is that truly what people want?

What does best practice tell us, experts in the fields?

We don't know because they weren't consulted or considered in the bill.

This is a well-intentioned bill.

However, it is light on details or on a vision for where this takes health care into the future.

Protecting our publicly provided services is a priority for NSGEU and our members.

I hope this bill gets the debate and proper consultation it deserves.

Thank you.