

Submission to Law Amendments – Oct 30, 2023

Submitted by: John Traves, K.C., CD, Municipal Solicitor

Thank-you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is not Cathie O’Toole and I am not the Chief Administrative Officer of the Halifax Regional Municipality. Ms. O’Toole sends her regrets. My name is John Traves and I am Executive Director of Legal and Legislative Services as well as Chief Governance Officer with HRM. Unlike Ms. O’Toole, who is a Fellow Chartered Professional Accountant and was a member of the Service Exchange Committee, I am the Municipal Solicitor.

We wish to commend the government on initiating service exchange discussions; as it has been almost 30 years since the last significant service exchange discussions. It is imperative to the continued success of the Province to have strong, financially viable local governments.

Halifax Regional Municipality is currently home to approximately 480,582 residents and makes up approximately 47% of the provincial population and 57.5% of the GDP. We are the fastest growing “big city” in Canada.

There are 49 municipalities in Nova Scotia, but this Bill applies to only 48, leaving the door open for a service exchange agreement with the Halifax Regional Municipality. We are committed to working with the Provincial government to reach an agreement to hopefully come into effect on April 1, 2024 at the same time as changes to other municipalities.

As the CAO of the municipality, there are three important points Ms. O’Toole would like you to consider:

- Tax-payers within the Halifax Regional Municipality deserve the same consideration as municipal tax-payers elsewhere in the Province. To move forward with service exchange April 1st without HRM would not be equitable.
- HRM has not asked for any special or separate deal and would have liked the choice of whether we could participate in the arrangement with the other municipalities. The Province has suggested HRM must be dealt with separately and that they recognize there is more complexity and different matters that potentially could be discussed with HRM.
- We are asking the Province to commit to a schedule of meetings to completed service exchange discussion with HRM, and would like assurance that no incremental costs would shift to HRM taxpayers in the interim as a result of Bill #340 relieving other municipalities from their obligation to pay toward housing and corrections or otherwise.

Bill #340 would relieve HRM of approximately \$12 million dollars in mandatory payments to the Province next year. These savings will benefit HRM taxpayers, however, it is important to note it will have no impact to savings in terms of general rated expenditures to deliver municipal services.

In our view all tax-payers, businesses, and residents within the Halifax Regional Municipality should be paying attention to the issue of service exchange and whether the municipality is being dealt with in a fair manner.

Thank you