

**Presentation to the Law Amendments Committee re Bill 198 - Emergency 911 Act
October 20, 2022**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the Law Amendments Committee with regards to the important legislation being put forward in Bill 198 - to amend the emergency 911 Act. As a disabled senior in a wheelchair who lives alone, I, and many other vulnerable persons, experienced the terror of no telecommunications, during and after the hurricane. I commend the government for enacting legislation to ensure that emergency systems work, both during and after an emergency. However, the only loss of life directly attributable to the hurricane in Nova Scotia was the loss of an elderly man with dementia who was swept away to sea. This gentleman's life might have been saved by a Voluntary Vulnerable Person's Registry, which I will refer to as the VVPR. This view was reiterated by Ontario police and Hampton, New Brunswick EMO officials, on CBC radio, who said their registries could have proven effective if that gentleman, or his family, had registered him as vulnerable. Worldwide studies show people with disabilities are two to four times more likely to die in a disaster. 30% of Nova Scotians identify as having some form of disability, and we have the highest proportion of seniors in Canada, many with family who live afar. That's a lot of vulnerable persons in our province. Vulnerable people are not always known to their neighbours, as we are often not "out and about" in the same way that able-bodied individuals might be. Additionally, neighbours could not have helped me evacuate safely as I have heavy electric wheelchair (which ran out of power, by the way, in the prolonged power outage period). A little known fact is that ambulances will not transfer mobility devices, so if an ambulance was sent to transport me to a comfort station, I would have no wheelchair (this rule applies to walkers, and folding manual wheelchairs as well). Ambulances have no means to tie mobility devices down. A Vulnerable Person's Registry would not only help identify the most vulnerable people in an emergency, **but include them in emergency planning**. In my example, a wheelchair van gassed up, at the ready in a strategic location would be part of local planning, not just for me, but for any person with mobility issues.

It has been brought to my attention that separate legislation, Bill 202, has been put forward in the House about the establishment of a Voluntary Vulnerable Persons Registry, after I spoke about this concept on CBC Radio on Sept 27. Many vulnerable people, caregivers, and families, and organizations including the Canadian military, have contacted me in support of this idea. I applaud Honourable Member Nicoll from Dartmouth-Cole Harbour, who brought this legislation forward, and to the Honourable Minister MacFarlane for her support of such a Registry. However, I am here today to suggest that this Registry, the VVPR, belongs in the EMO Act, since it would be utilized and administered by EMO officials during emergencies. The Registry is not a social service, or a housing service, it's an emergency service and therefore belongs in this Act. Since the EMO Act is already being amended, it would be efficient to add one simple line to the legislation. This is the first of my proposed amendments - something to the effect **that from here forward the government will legislate the establishment of a Voluntary Vulnerable Persons Registry in all Nova Scotian municipalities, to be led and administered by the office of EMO, using First Voice consultations to develop effective, efficient policies and procedures**. Once the Registry has been legislated, its structure can be developed in consultation with vulnerable persons and EMO officials. This would allow for flexible community-based systems and approaches, suitable for the varying urban and rural situations found in our province.

Furthermore, I respectfully suggest, that in your amendments **you legislate that telecommunications companies be required to ensure that during, and after an emergency, EMO has adequate systems to link the Registry to appropriate officials so that they can assist and support the vulnerable persons and/or families, based on preset protocols, who voluntarily chose to register with EMO officials**. The danger of not linking the Registry to demands made to the telecommunications companies, is that the Registry exists, but EMO officials can't access the information due to communications failures and disruptions. Thank you very much again for the opportunity to present my views before this committee. I'd be honoured to assist the government further to advance the development of the Registry, and welcome any questions this committee may have for me.

Anne Camozzi - [REDACTED]

Mr Chairman, Members of the Nova Scotia Law Amendments Committee

Presentation by: Gerry Post, 20 October 2022

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide input into Bill 198, An Act to Amend the Emergency "911" Act.

I would like to echo the proposal put forward by the previous speaker, Ms Anne Camozzi for an amendment that would create a Voluntary Vulnerable Persons Registry, which I will refer to as The Registry.

I would also like to acknowledge the Private Member's Bill put forth by the Member from Dartmouth-Cole Harbour to Establish a Registry of Vulnerable Persons, and the positive response in the Legislature by Minister Karla MacFarlane.

I think we have support on all sides of the house on this initiative. Most of us have loved ones that would welcome it. 43% of our seniors have at least one form of a disability, the highest in Canada because we're also one of the oldest provinces.

When I became disabled 10 years ago and left hospital, finding an accessible apartment was impossible. I found something that was adequate but on the 6th floor of a high rise tower. Once settled, one of my first calls was to the Halifax Fire Department because I assumed there would be a registry...I was very concerned about being stuck on the 6th floor during a fire.

Of course there was no Registry, and when asked what I should do for safety the answer was 'move to the ground floor'. After five years I now live on the ground floor thanks to the generosity of a friend who was renovating a building...I am privileged...most in the disability community struggle with affordable / accessible housing.

The vision I had for a Registry is that...

- In case I had to call 911, my call would be automatically flagged as coming from a vulnerable person in a wheelchair and that this would be communicated to the responders; or
- In the case an emergency fire call from my building address, the responders would be notified that there are vulnerable persons in the building, including their location (e.g. Apt. 123)
- Or in the case of a power outage the appropriate agencies would be advised of the vulnerable persons in the outage catchment area.

The Registry is therefore more than a list, it's a system that links different data sets and technologies from different organizations along with protocols on what to do under various emergency circumstances and how to deal with different disabilities. Training of first responders would be important. A cocktail of technologies including computer mapping and artificial intelligence makes all of this possible.

And nothing works in isolation.

Mr. Chairman, your Department of Justice is currently working on an Accessible Built Environment Standard, it is important that this Standard include such public safety & emergency features as requirements for Evacu-chairs in high rise buildings and flashing fire alarms for our deaf citizens.

I hope you share this dream...you or a loved-one may need it someday! And the commitment for an Accessible NS by 2030 is not far off.



Mr. Chairman, let's have the Government take leadership on this and start with the Dept of Justice building across the street...I had an office there on the 9th floor and during fire drills I use to joke that they should just issue me a pill to reduce my suffering. They moved the Accessibility Directorate to the 3rd floor. But let's ensure there is an Evacu-Chair for every third floor. These chairs are relatively inexpensive and allow persons with mobility issues to be easily transported down stairs. It would set an example for others to follow, no need to wait!

But I digress...my recommendations are to Amend Bill 198 to...

- 1. Enable Nova Scotia to develop and maintain a Voluntary Vulnerable Persons Registry;**
- 2. Assign EMO with responsibility for the Registry;**
- 3. Ensure that the planning, design and implementation of the Registry be a collaborative & integrated initiative involving all stakeholders including First Voices from the vulnerable communities;**
- 4. Require Critical Service Providers to integrate the Registry into their systems;**
- 5. Provide EMO with a one year deadline to complete the Registry Design and Operational Plan, along with a Budget.**

In closing, I would also like to thank the Government for reversing its decision on virtual presentations for persons with disabilities, its the only way Ms Camozzi was able to exercise her democratic rights, but much more can be done to enrich the legislative process at virtually no cost.

Thank you Mr Chairman and Members of the Committee, this concludes my presentation.

Gerry Post

