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From: Shelagh Campbell-Palmer [REDACTED]
Sent: February 24, 2025 1:56 PM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: Bill 1 - Proposed amendments to the Act Respecting Government Organization and Administration

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To: Nova Scotia Legislature Law Amendments Committee:

I am writing regarding my concerns with respect to the recent introduction of *Bill 1 - Proposed Amendments to the Act Respecting Government Organization and Administration*. In disbelief, I had to recheck what I was hearing when this story aired on the news. One of the most significant proposed amendments effectively gives government the ability to dismiss the Auditor General (AG) without cause. The fact that this move was buried in an 'omnibus' piece of legislation speaks volumes. It begs the question "What is it they do not want the public to know?"

My MLA, Julie Vanexan reasoned in a letter to me that the changes are "...simply meant as a clarification of current legislation. For example, the rule that a two-thirds majority is needed to dismiss the Auditor General has already existed before the current legislation was proposed." I would argue that the proposed changes are far more than a "clarification", and in fact, they change the tone and intent of the legislation completely. Although a 2/3 majority has been required in the past to dismiss the auditor general, current legislation requires that there be *cause or incapacity* to do so, and the removal of that safeguard is the crux of the matter.

The Auditor's position is required to conduct "...an independent view of public sector performance and accountability." As public sector employees, more than anyone, our Premier and MLA's are (supposed to be) accountable to each and every Nova Scotian citizen for how their hard earned dollars are spent. The removal of "*without cause or incapacity*", presumably means that the premier would be able to dismiss the AG for any reason. This so called 'clarification', effectively removes the independence from the role (an employee who can be dismissed for any reason will not be inclined to report openly and honestly in her role as government watchdog).

Ms. Vanexan quoted the AG as having "...recognized that "with a few exceptions, government has agreed to almost all" of the more than 200 recommendations made over the last four years." This misses the point – it is not the past that is in question, but rather how these proposed changes to the Act will impact the integrity of the relationship between the AG and government *going forward*. If the government doesn't like the AG's findings, then new and better processes must be created to ensure Nova Scotians are well served by the dollars they invest in our government. That shouldn't change because they won a significant majority. It's that simple.

The government's explanation that the changes are needed to bring Nova Scotia in line with other provinces is not an explanation at all. Only two of 10 provinces do not require just cause to dismiss their auditors general. At this time BC, Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick, PEI and Newfoundland and Labrador all require cause or incapacity to do so.

The attempted move by the government to water down some of the checks and balances on their activities is more than worrisome. In these currently frightening and dystopic times, Nova Scotians need and deserve to be reassured in the knowledge that there is absolute transparency and accountability in how our hard-earned tax dollars are being spent and more importantly, that our democracy is secure. Thank you for taking my concerns into account as you review and evaluate these amendments to the legislation.

Sincerely,
Shelagh A Campbell-Palmer