



News Release

March 3, 2025

Bill 12 – Egregious Bill Puts University Power in Hands of the Minister

KJIPUKTUK (Halifax) – Nova Scotia faculty are sounding the alarm at the introduction of Bill 12. If passed, this bill will give the Minister of Advanced Education unprecedented power to appoint the majority of members to university Boards, dictate that research align only with government priorities, and provide unchecked authority to force universities into a revitalization process.

“Under the guise of sustainability and accountability, Bill 12 provides the Minister of Advanced Education the power to standardize Board composition” says Scott Stewart, president of the Association of Nova Scotia University Teachers. “The danger here, while limiting Boards to no more than 30 members, is that the Minister will have absolute power to appoint up to half of the Board members, which effectively stacks the deck in a manner that may not necessarily consider the best interests of the university.”

Further, the Bill will enable the Minister alone to determine the key research priorities of the province, and then require the Research Nova Scotia Corporation to align their research to those priorities. As an independent, not-for-profit corporation, with the mandate to support, organize and co-ordinate the funding of research in the province, management and control of the corporation lies with a Board of Directors, and a competent advisory committee that provides advice and makes recommendations on research-related matters. “Providing the Minister with the power to single-handedly steer the focus of research or lose funding is narrow minded, and dangerous,” says Stewart. “Capacity building, forest growth, disability management, agri-genomics, and zoonotic infections are just a few recent examples of research projects that may not get funded in the future if the Minister deems our priorities lie elsewhere. Research priorities need to stay safely in the hands of the researchers and scientists who can objectively identify the merits of each project.”

Lastly, Bill 12 will provide the Minister with unchecked authority to force universities into a revitalization process. Failure to comply will result in the Minister withholding operating funds from the university. Currently, this step is voluntary, allowing the university to decide if and when revitalization plan should be engaged. “The threat here is to the right to collective bargaining for all university employees, from the staff who clean the halls, and keep the boilers



running, to those who offer administrative support and faculty who teach the students. Once again, the power to make those vital decisions needs to remain with the university.”

Prior to introducing Bill 12, the Minister, who is also House Leader, introduced a resolution that gives the government the ability to limit the length of time for debate, and to invoke closure, or end a debate with notice, and changed the law amendments committee to the public bills committee, limiting the opportunity for the public to offer feedback and suggestions on proposed legislation. “These changes tie our hands, and prevent constructive dialogue that is helpful in creating strong, fair legislation for post-secondary education and other sectors,” says Stewart. “I encourage everyone with an interest in the PSE sector – from students and parents, to staff, administrators and faculty – to push back on this proposed bill, and make your concerns known to the Minister.”

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Background:

The Association of Nova Scotia University Teachers (ANSUT) represents faculty at the majority of Nova Scotia’s universities. ANSUT’s vision is to provide its member Associations with the strongest possible voice on post-secondary education issues in the province of Nova Scotia, and to advance its mission by engaging the active participation of its members, both individually and institutionally, to achieve that end.



March 3, 2025

The Honourable Tim Houston
Premier of Nova Scotia
PO Box 726
Halifax NS B3J 2T3

Email: premier@novascotia.ca

Dear Premier,

As president of the Association of Nova Scotia University Teachers (ANSUT), I write to you on behalf of our 1,300 members to express our dismay at the recent introduction of Bill 12. ANSUT represents faculty at the majority of Nova Scotia's universities, and provides its member Associations with the strongest possible voice on post-secondary education issues in the province of Nova Scotia.

As you are aware, this bill will give the Minister of Advanced Education unprecedented power to appoint the majority of members to university Boards, dictate that research align with government priorities, and provide unchecked authority to force universities into a revitalization process.

When the *Universities Accountability and Sustainability Act* was first introduced in 2015, ANSUT representatives spoke against it, arguing that "the Act stands to put institutions of higher learning at the behest of large-scale industry and business, destroy collective bargaining, undermine bicameral university governance, and, despite all that, entirely fail to provide the financial accountability that universities actually need: oversight measures designed to ensure that the core academic mission of universities is not shortchanged in the name of short-term economic targets".

Others spoke against the Act also. One speaker in particular spoke about the danger of the unspecified revitalization plan, saying:

- "The framework for a crisis actually exists within this bill."
- "Giving up your intellectual property objectives or the freedom of intellectual property" is "something we should be very careful of."
- "These are risks when we say that the government of the day - whatever day that happens to be, whatever government that happens to be - is going to dictate the terms of the revitalization plan in terms of making sure that the universities are doing things that meet that government's objectives. That's a dangerous thing particularly when you consider that it can be triggered by the government itself to begin with."
- "There is great potential in universities creating quality research, and I don't think anybody in this Chamber wants to see that potential diminished. I don't know that there's



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a role for government to be reaching into that system and dictating where that research should be going. I think that's something that's better left to minds more creative than many of the members in this Chamber"

That speaker was you, Premier Houston, and we were grateful to have you and several of your fellow MLAs use the Law Amendments Committee as a tool to argue against the dangers inherent in Bill 100. But it causes me to wonder why, now that your government is in power, you seek, not to rescind this act, but increase the danger by giving your Minister full control of Boards of Governors, research and financial exigency.

I ask your government to take your own advice, and reconsider the adoption of this bill, or at least slow the pace, and allow for much needed input and thoughtful consideration of the potential damage it could cause to our post-secondary education sector. ANSUT representatives would like to meet with you to share our concerns, and offer suggestions for changes to the bill that would enable accountability and sustainability without such dire consequences for our beloved institutions of higher learning.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr. Scott Stewart', is written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Scott Stewart
ANSUT President