



December 7, 2011

Law Amendments Committee  
Nova Scotia Legislature

VIA FAX 424-0547

Re. Arts Nova Scotia Act (Bill 124)

### **Introduction**

My name is Shahin Sayadi; I am the founder and Artistic Director of Onelight Theatre, a professional company that develops and produces theatre shows that are presented locally and which tour nationally and internationally.

I am also the Artistic Producer of Prismatic, a national inter-disciplinary arts festival that showcases and celebrates the work of Canada's leading Artists of Colour. I have been living in Halifax for 21 years, I studied my craft in this province and I have been working as a professional artist in Nova Scotia for more than 10 years.

I am writing today with respect to the Arts Nova Scotia Act and, in particular, section 6 of the proposed Act, which establishes the mandate of the Arts Nova Scotia Board. As will be outlined below, although this section requires the Board to strive for regional, artistic and developmental equity in funding distribution, it has not addressed the need for equity in funding distribution for Nova Scotia's culturally diverse artists.

This is an unfortunate oversight, one that could have significant consequences for the future of arts and culture in Nova Scotia. Fortunately, it is also an oversight that is easily corrected with a small amendment. I hope that you will consider my submissions and amend Bill 124 accordingly.

### **Arts Nova Scotia Act and Section 6**

As you know, the Arts Nova Scotia Act is part of a significant evolution of the arts and culture governance in the province. This Act creates a Board that will oversee much of Nova Scotia's arts and culture programming and funding. It is an arms' length Board and will, ostensibly, operate at a distance from the government.

As a Nova Scotian artist, I support this initiative and believe that it will contribute to the growth and development of arts and culture in the province. The Arts Nova Scotia Board will play an important role in our province and the mandate given to the Board that will shape the initiatives and priorities of its work.

The proposed mandate of the Board includes many laudable goals such as: fostering artistic excellence, investing in the creativity of all artistic disciplines and striving to make the arts integral to the lives of all Nova Scotians. The Board is also mandated to “strive for regional, artistic and developmental equity in the distribution of funding.” (Section 6(i))

This section gives the Arts Nova Scotia Board a mandate to ensure, through investigations, programming and funding initiatives, equitable access and funding based on region, artistic practice and artistic development. It is a strong mandate, which no doubt will help set Arts Nova Scotia’s priorities in the coming years.

Those who have participated in drafting the Act have seen the necessity to promote funding equity for artists from Nova Scotia’s different regions, artists who practice in different forms and media and for artists in various stages of professional development. I cannot comment on whether these are pressing equity issues within Nova Scotia.

From my perspective, however, there is a pressing need to address the under-representation of culturally diverse artists in our professional arts community. This issue has not been addressed in the Arts Nova Scotia Act and I feel that this can and must be remedied.

### **Equity for Culturally Diverse Artists**

I believe that Nova Scotia has a wealth of talented artists, but many of our visible minority artists do not always have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Culturally diverse artists are under-represented in Nova Scotia’s professional arts and we, as a community, are poorer for it.

This is not an issue that is unique to Nova Scotia; indeed, the Canada Council for the Arts recognized that nation-wide arts funding to culturally diverse artists was inadequate. The Canada Council took steps to implement targeted programs and funding to remedy this situation. Other provinces have followed suit.

It is noted that in section 8(3)(b) of the Act, there is a requirement that the Board, itself have culturally diverse representation:

*(b) where possible, include representation from differing art disciplines, generations and the Province’s cultural mosaic including, but not limited to, representation from the African Nova Scotian, Mi’kmaq and Acadian communities and balanced representation between women and men*

If it is important for there to be diversity in the Board, why not in the broader arts community?

I do not believe that having a diverse Board will offer sufficient protection to the interests of culturally diverse artists. Section 6(i), as it is currently written, is a finite list. An issue that is not within that list is, by definition, outside of the equity mandate of the Board.

Nova Scotia is in the process of laying the foundation for arts and culture policies, programs and funding that will, hopefully, see our province through another generation of growth and development. This is an important time to take the necessary steps to ensure that the future of Nova Scotia's arts and culture includes all voices and all peoples.

Some might say that the only criteria for arts funding should be artistic merit. Certainly, I would not disagree that this should be a guiding principle in funding, but artistic merit does not need to be the only criteria, particularly when it is evident that there is a need to level the playing field, address historic imbalances and provide access for certain artistic groups so that they can, in the near future, compete on the basis of artistic merit alone.

Some may also say that there is no evidence that culturally diverse artists are under-represented in terms of visibility or funding. If there is no evidence, it is because there has been no effort, at least in the past decade, to collect statistical information in Nova Scotia with respect to artists who are applying for and receiving funding.

Anecdotally, it is apparent that there is an absence of artists of colour in our professional arts and culture community. By excluding cultural diversity for the equity mandate of the Arts Nova Scotia Board, we may never know the statistical extent of under-representation. It seems trite to deny the need for equity for culturally diverse artists on the basis that there has been no initiative to formally examine the issue in Nova Scotia.

In any case, our concern is not only a matter of numbers, it is the social impact of under-representation. Our arts and culture should be representative of our communities; it is important for people to see themselves, their experiences, their cultural traditions, and their world-views in our artistic environment.

In the proposed Arts Nova Scotia Act, the government has recognized the need to ensure that there is greater equality in the distribution of funding and has directed the Arts Nova Scotia Board to strive for equity for regional, artistic and developmental differences – but not for under-represented culturally diverse artists. This is a mistake and will only serve to increase the gap between Nova Scotian artists of colour and their colleagues.

### **Proposed Amendment**

Currently, section 6 of the Arts Nova Scotia Act reads:

#### **6 The objects of the Board are to**

- (a) strive to make the arts integral to the lives of all Nova Scotians;
- (b) advance the arts by investing in creativity, fostering innovation and promoting the value of the arts;
- (c) foster artistic excellence throughout the Province;
- (d) encourage creative expression by funding activity in the arts;
- (e) invest in the creativity of all artistic disciplines;
- (f) design and administer programs to support professional artists and arts organizations;
- (g) utilize peer assessment processes to determine artistic merit and the allocation of funding;
- (h) communicate to the community at large the cultural, social and economic importance of the arts;
- (i) strive for regional, artistic and developmental equity in the distribution of funding;**
- (j) conduct research on matters relating to the arts;
- (k) advise the Minister on the development of programs in support of the arts

We would suggest amending 6(i) to read:

***In the distribution of funding, strive for regional, artistic, and developmental equity and equity for artists from racialized groups.***

It may also be necessary to define "racialized communities" and related terms either in the Act or in a Regulation. We suggest the following definitions of key terms, taken from the Canada Council for the Arts:

### Cultural Diversity

*Cultural diversity is the presence, expressions and participation of many different individuals and communities co-existing in the general culture of a society, and the explicit recognition that the contribution and participation of all peoples, including marginalized people, have the potential of equal value and benefit to the society at large.*

*While cultural diversity is a broad and inclusive term, the Canada Council uses the adjective "culturally diverse" to respectfully identify racialized groups that correspond to what is commonly understood as visible minorities.*

### Racialized Groups

*Groups designated as different based on perceived race or ethnicities and on that basis subjected to differential and unequal treatment. In the present context, racialized groups include those who may experience differential treatment on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, culture, etc. That is, treated outside the norm and receiving unequal treatment based upon phenotypical features.*

### Culturally Diverse Artists and Arts Organizations:

*artists who are Canadian citizens or landed immigrants, who are of African, Asian, Latin American, Middle Eastern and mixed racial descents*

*organizations that engage in culturally diverse artistic practices (practices that explore and represent the expressions, perspectives and experiences of culturally diverse artists or are rooted in the artistic traditions of one or more of the cultures indicated above).*

Please note, we have intentionally not addressed the issue of equity and under-representation with respect to Nova Scotia's Aboriginal artists; we understand that our Aboriginal colleagues are addressing their concerns with respect to this Act and we support their initiatives.

We understand that addressing issues of equity for culturally diverse artists and arts organizations is a complex exercise. However, as the proposed Arts Nova Scotia Act does not include cultural diversity as part of the Board's equity mandate, it is quite possible that this work will not receive the attention that it deserves and requires.

As one of the more established culturally diverse arts organizations in Nova Scotia, we are prepared to work with the Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage to develop strategies and programming that will address the under-representation of culturally diverse artists in our province.



We hope that you will consider making this important amendment to the Arts Nova Scotia Act so that we can all work together to ensure that the future of arts and culture in Nova Scotia represents all voices and all peoples.

In the event that the Law Amendment Committee has any questions or requires anything further, I can be reached at: 902-425-6812 or [shahin@onelighttheatre.com](mailto:shahin@onelighttheatre.com).

Thank you for your consideration.

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