

My name is Merydie Ross & I am here today to ask for your help regarding the future of the youth of the South Shore.

I am 22 years old, and I completed the French Immersion program at Hebbville Academy, I graduated as Students' Council President from Park View Education Centre, and I served as a youth student representative on Park View's School Advisory Council.

I left Canada to complete my Bachelor of Arts degree in International Politics because as an active youth striving to find ways to benefit my rural community with a sustainable future, I wanted to learn about what the rest of the world was doing so I could bring that knowledge back to rural Nova Scotia. Today I will share some of that knowledge with you.

Since completing my degree, I have returned to Nova Scotia and I want to establish a family on the South Shore. My peers – those young adults who I grew up with year after year through school on the South Shore - have those same desires, but few have the opportunities to realize these desires and fewer still will have the opportunity to do so, even after they start raising young families away from where they were raised, because on the South Shore we have very little offer these young adults in way of a sustainable future. Today, the Committee on Law Amendments has the opportunity to change this, and to contribute to our numerous efforts to create a sustainable, financially viable, and valued, culturally distinct future for the youth and future generations of the South Shore.

The future of our generation and those to come is facing an imminent threat. It is perfectly clear to the public that the ONLY reason the Education Act is facing amendment of the minimal number of democratically elected School Board seats is a direct result of the South Shore Regional School Board's recommendation to reduce the number of school board seats, rather than to overhaul wasteful School Board bureaucratic expenditures and salaries. As everybody knows, this recommendation bears absolutely no reflection of the desires of the public on the South Shore, because it was created NOT by School Board members democratically elected by the people of the South Shore, but by an undemocratically appointed bureaucrat.

For those of you unfamiliar with the South Shore, the most effective way of broadcasting information and gauging public opinion, is by word of mouth that only locals are synced into, and as one such local, I am here to tell you that the number one concern regarding education on the South Shore is school closures.

With the upcoming School Review process, far too many of the schools on the South Shore are listed for possible closure.

The Municipality of the District of Lunenburg has repeatedly voiced their frustration with increasing school closures that leave them with non-functional facilities that no longer have any monetary nor community value. Already, two elementary schools have closed in our municipality since I graduated from high school.

If the South Shore Regional School Board only has 5 seats in the very near future, it is beyond doubt that we will continue to see school closures. If only 5 democratically elected School Board members have to choose which schools will close, we can be certain that so long as each of the five board members represents one regional school, they will allow our other schools to close.

Who, really, do the decisions being made here today, affect? They affect families, they affect future generations, they affect the quality of life on the South Shore, but most of all, they affect CHILDREN.

If Bill 13 passes, the people of the South Shore will fight to safeguard our democratic rights to vote for more accurately representative School Board members, and we will do this at the Nova Scotia Utilities & Review Board public hearing that will determine the final number of seats we have. This public hearing is the same one that has been moved to accommodate these amendments to the Education Act by Bill 13, amendments that have been suggested because the single member of the South Shore Regional School Board's seat recommendations were illegal under our Education Act.

However, I am asking this committee for help. It is your duty to represent the wishes of the people of Nova Scotia. And while this may be your 9-5 job, your decision regarding Bill 13 is about our LIVES.

Please do not diminish our democratic representation on the South Shore School Board. It is the South Shore School Board who has asked for these, and it will be those students, those children and youth who attend school on the South Shore.

I am here this evening because being a former South Shore student, I KNOW how our students and youth will be affected by these decisions. This decision intimately affects our day to day lives and the future viability of providing a future for families on the South Shore of Nova Scotia. Beyond the atrociously brazen push to legalize illegal recommendations by a non-democratically elected board member, Bill 13 is an outrageous demonstration of attempts to take advantage of children and youth who cannot vote.

If Bill 13 passes, our schools become centralized, so too will our services and communities, and our rural communities will lose their life, they will become developed urban sprawl that irreversibly destroys our natural resources. If Bill 13 passes, our schools will close, and our students will get less individual attention as a result of losing their small class sizes, they will have more bullying problems in larger schools, they will lose the small communities that raised them, that want them to come back from school and raise their own families. If Bill 13 passes, every student will know why their school closed, why as an elementary student, starting as a 5 yr old, they rode a bus for well over an HOUR, just to go to school. If Bill 13 passes, it will not be because I didn't represent the interests of our children, but it will be because of YOUR decision.

I am here tonight because

Please do what is right. Please think of your own families, please think of your own children, please think of us young people who want to raise our families in safe, rural communities. Please think of future generations. Please invest in a sustainable future. Please do not reduce the number of legally allowable School Board Seats.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.