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**From:** Jennifer Kanaski [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, February 13, 2017 1:33 AM  
**To:** Office of the Legislative Counsel  
**Subject:** Law Amendments Letter  
**Attachments:** Dear Speaker of the House.docx

Please find attached a letter in response to the attempts of Premier McNeil to impose a contract on the NSTU.

Jennifer Kanaski

Dear Speaker of the House:

The ongoing dispute between the teachers of this province and Premier McNeil has long been an issue of money – how much money is Premier McNeil willing to invest in the province of Nova Scotia? Education is the cornerstone of a successful community and should top the list of investment priorities. One of the primary differences between First World countries and developing countries is access to free, quality education for all of its people, as well as a government's transparent commitment to continually invest in education. We are at a crossroads in this province; one in which, thus far, the government has chosen to travel down a regressive path of devaluing, defunding, and eroding education. Premier McNeil's mishandling of taxpayers' money and disdain for the working class, along with Karen Casey's disrespect towards teachers and ineptitude in regards to education, has led us all to this point. Teachers and other public sector workers are being asked to pay the price for McNeil's bad economic judgement. McNeil is obsessed with establishing a balanced budget; an austerity plan that he says is a hard line drawn in the sand at the same time as his being fiscally irresponsible and incredibly generous with his own friends. McNeil is also obsessed with union busting. This is another example of bad economics. Unions and collective bargaining agreements represent a power relationship that allows a greater spread of wealth to occur. Without representation, any gains in economic productivity are lost to those who comprise the workforce and instead flow straight into the pockets of the top one percent – this does not lead to a successful province. The austerity plan of Premier McNeil is supposedly meant to allow the Nova Scotian economy to flourish. The money spent on the Nova Star ferry in Yarmouth, the Bluenose II, and the hard line on public sector wage negotiations are all meant to spur economic growth and help balance the budget. We cannot, however, depend solely on tourism to spur economic growth and thus the burden whittles down to the people of the province. The economy flourishes when people are spending money locally, but this is a difficult onus to bear when the people needed to spend money have less and less to spend. We are asking our public sector workers to take pay cuts, to give up their long-term service award, *and* to stimulate the economy. How is anyone supposed to spend money they don't have?

Premier McNeil claims that the province does not have the money in the budget to meet the teachers' and other public sector employees' demands. Interestingly enough, he seems to keep coming up with additional millions of dollars that 'could' be invested into education – this is not chump change you find in the couch cushions, clearly the province is not as poor as he would have us believe. This statement of no funds is a hard pill to swallow when there appears to also be plenty of funds to spend on money for negative ad campaigns geared at denigrating teachers; money for ad campaigns implemented to defend the 19% hike to seniors' Pharmacare; money to spend on apology letters to those seniors; money to foot the bill in order to send a slew of millionaires to MIT for economic development training; money to give a 9% wage increase to a single employee in a single year, amounting to about \$17,000; as well as, money for the patronage appointment of Laurie Graham to the position of the 'Premier's Principal Secretary' at \$160,000 a year (a higher salary than the premier's chief of staff or any cabinet minister). In addition, there appears to be plenty of money to meet the various MLA's living expenses. In December 2016, Karen Casey who resides in the Colchester North riding of Truro, spent \$1,583.87 in

living expenses alone; money designated for those living further than 100km from the legislature. Premier McNeil previously asked where public sector workers expected him to find the money for their demands – a good starting point is to look inward.

Premier McNeil also previously stated that the people of Nova Scotia must make sacrifices in order for the province to be successful. Nova Scotia's politicians have yet to set this example for the public sector workers it so eagerly financially gouges. In 2010, The Canadian Taxpayers Federation recommended "a 'citizens' panel' to review MLA compensation, including pensions." They recommended that MLA salary increases or decreases be tied to changes in key economic indicators, reflecting the experience of taxpaying constituents. At the time, Nova Scotia politicians collected a base salary of \$86,619 with additional salaries, ranging from \$515 to \$109,484, being attributed to those with additional duties. Despite the enormous, essential contribution teachers make to the province of Nova Scotia, in comparison, they make, on average, \$73,000 annually and unlike our politicians, they do not get additional monies for the additional duties they perform. By 2013, MLA salaries had increased to \$89,234 – a three percent raise over three years. MLA's are currently in the midst of a wage freeze; however, their previous pension plan in which the minimum years required was five was most recently altered to a mere two years. This is also a pension that taxpayers, in 2010, paid into at a rate of \$22 to every \$1 contributed by an MLA. In this instance, Premier McNeil allowed a third party panel to reach this decision on pensions; however, in regards to the public sector, he vehemently claimed that he would not allow a third party to decide how money should be spent in the province. Teachers have been vilified for daring to fight for their financial security, for withdrawing the many services they provide that are outside of their contractual obligations, and for demanding changes in the classroom. Their service award is likely the first benefit this government is seeking to cut – future contract negotiations of this kind will only lead to further cuts, and yet, in 2011, a review commissioned to review MLA pensions that was "heavily influenced by a robust array of submissions from present and past MLA's" decided to trim the rate at which future benefits accrued, while still leaving MLA's with benefits "worth perhaps twice as much as those available to civil servants and teachers." The argument made was that amongst MLA's, "most work extremely hard, in employment which has very low job security. We should not begrudge our MLA's their salaries" – this was based off the many nights and weekends spent talking to constituents and attending community events, where not all of the discussions are pleasant. This government has stirred up an always present firestorm in which teachers are made out to be greedy, to be all about the money, and, as the Premier stated, to be so willing to negotiate on the backs of vulnerable Nova Scotians. Somehow, the government has sent out the message that teachers don't work extremely hard, that they don't work many nights and weekends, and that they don't work in adverse conditions or have unpleasant conversations with parents and students. Unlike our politicians, the public is encouraged to begrudge our teachers their salaries.

McNeil gave a 9% wage increase to a single employee for a single year that amounts to \$17,000. This generosity is 4.5 times what the NSTU asked for in a single year, and 12.1 times the amount McNeil supposedly counter proposed for a single year. The defense for this wage increase was that anyone whose workload doubles or triples deserves to be compensated accordingly. Teachers workloads have increased tenfold with no compensation in sight; instead they have their service award under threat of

termination (a unilateral decision that would be contrary to the rules of fair and collective bargaining as set out by the Supreme Court of Canada); they have Karen Casey threatening to implement an action plan that would extend the school day for teachers alone, that requires they have professional development and meetings regularly on top of their normal duties which they must still accomplish in the limited amount of prep time they are given (i.e., at home); and now, with the end of work to rule around the corner, they are expected to "get back to normal." This means continuing to provide services that are outside of their contractual obligations with no compensation and little appreciation. This all greatly increases an already increased workload but they are somehow expected to do so at a wage package that with inflation amounts to a 4% loss, as well as lose their service award, another cut to their salary. The service award is better referred to as deferred wages. It is not a bonus; it is a part of their wages. Years ago, the teachers, in an effort to save the government money, agreed to defer a wage increase to be doled out at the end of their career in the form of a Service Award. Revoking this is not only negotiating in bad faith, but it's yet another pay decrease for teachers who would not be privy to this fairly negotiated item. The government is retroactively breaking a binding contract. They have no legal standing to do this; they are banking on teachers voting away their rights. This is unconscionable. If the government wanted to legitimately ask for public sector workers to sacrifice for the welfare of the province and accept a pay cut, they should perhaps make an effort to sacrifice themselves. MLAs currently receive their own Service Award, strategically renamed a Transition Allowance – they have shown no intention to revoke a service award that at a minimum, triples that of a teachers. Surely sacrifice would be easier to swallow if demonstrated from the top-down. Instead, they are expected to accept this while watching McNeil give out a \$17,000 pay increase for someone whose workload has apparently increased at 4.5 times the value of the work of teachers. And now, these same teachers are being asked to trust a government that seeks to back out of a binding, legal contract to commit funds to a non-binding committee aimed at reviewing inclusion and a non-binding committee to explore current classroom conditions.

Education has not had solid financial investments in years. Our provincial government likes to reiterate this notion of investing \$60 million in education – leaving out the fact that some of that was money put back into the education budget after being removed by the NDP or the fact that the majority of that figure was a result of merging two departments. There is no new money, it's just spin. McNeil's government clearly has no desire to invest actual money into education, or put actual effort into addressing the systemic problems that exist. Over the past year, teachers have been very vocal about what they want – neither the government nor the provincial executive of the union appeared to be listening. Instead, we have a dollar figure that is meant to sway public opinion, but broken down is a waste of taxpayer's money. Committees are obviously needed to address ever evolving classroom conditions and educational policies; however, teachers have been left out of this once again, contrary to one of their main asks – for frontline personnel to be the primary decision makers about what is needed in the classroom. There is no wording within the contract that even suggests that teachers would be the leading force in addressing classroom conditions or educational initiatives. This means a great deal of money being spent by the same people who have led us down the rabbit hole of redundant data collection and harmful initiatives and policies. Once again, the language of the contract is such that no classroom conditions have actually been addressed or even acknowledged. We all should have known

that there was no possible way that classroom conditions would be addressed during the time spent on negotiations. There are many aspects of the system that were not likely to be addressed or solved during this time; however, how hard is it to rollback some of the harmful initiatives that have been enforced under Karen Casey? Retracting the no-zero policy would be a substantial beginning change. So too would an attendance policy that actually enforces attendance. Instead, we have insignificant fluff in the form of an offer to review and explore learning conditions – this certainly doesn't suggest any changes being implemented in a timely manner, or even done by people who know what's needed or what's wrong. The hope is that people will be swayed by the offer of \$20 million to address classroom conditions; however, this will be absorbed at the departmental level and nothing constructive or positive is likely to result.

The government put dollar figures on some of their additional offers, including two days paid leave. First off, I have not once seen a single teacher ask for this. Secondly, it is also poorly named and a waste of money. It is not two days off with pay; it is two days to spend on prep and marking, depending on who you ask – the premier or the union. This is unbelievable waste – in order to take these days off to prep and mark, a teacher would have to prepare a class for a substitute and sacrifice that day in moving forward with their curriculum. This is double the work in order to alleviate the workload. The millions of dollars this is supposedly worth could be better spent on classroom conditions or not revoking a fairly negotiated Service Award. The government is clearly willing to throw money away, so long as no money is being spent on teachers – this cannot be avoided if classroom conditions are to be seriously addressed. More personnel to help with class sizes and to help with the sheer amount of adaptations and varied learning in a single classroom is a basic need that the government is unwilling to meet. A lot of people are asking, so what did teachers want? Teachers, simply put, wanted immediate change. They wanted, and still want, any investments to not be spent under the direction of Karen Casey. They wanted, and still want, ever unmanageable student to teacher ratios to be addressed, the lack of EA's in a classroom with ever diversified learning needs and skills to be addressed, the no-zero policy to be retracted, retention to be reinstated, an enforceable attendance policy to be enacted, and for teachers to be allowed to just teach. Minister Casey claims on her website that since 2013, she has "recognized the importance of listening to teachers who are experts in the field" and claimed that their concerns have driven many of the government's decisions regarding public school. This is categorically false. The committees and panels that Karen Casey employs to come up with her action plan do not include public school teachers in their make-up. They do not listen to the recommendations of teachers; instead, a survey was made available to the public. So much for valuing the expertise of teachers. If this government had been listening, they would have heard teachers, parents and students decrying the no-zero policy, demanding an enforceable attendance policy, arguing for retention, and seeking reform on the current model of inclusion. They would have heard about overcrowded classrooms, mental health issues running rampant with not enough support, social issues of students weighing on teachers, behavioural issues, and the increasingly varied levels of learning within the classroom. The Minister of Education's ineptitude when it comes to overseeing education has to come into play when contemplating this offer of 20 million dollars.

One of the other significant aspects of teacher workload that was not even alluded to in this most recent tentative agreement is voluntary, unpaid work that has become increasingly mandatory. Work to rule has demonstrated the amount of work that teachers do that is above and beyond their contractual obligations. Many people seem to want this work to be mandatory and for the language of the contract to simply change to reflect what they want. Once work to rule was announced as being phased out, the majority of students, parents and other members of the province, espoused this notion of 'back to normal' and 'getting back all the extras.' There was no regard for the overwhelming feeling of teachers that the volunteering they do is unappreciated or simply too much. The concept of voluntary work was lost once again as very few stopped to ask whether the teachers would actually be returning to being taken advantage of; they simply assumed there would be no problem in re-establishing sports, clubs and school trips. This work is once again mandatory. This was even reinforced by the Minister of Education.

The government has shown just how little it values the work of teachers and other public sector employees, the education of the province's children, or the concern of anyone other than the top one percent. Austerity is not feasible for everyone in this province. If the government wants the province to be successful, they should want individual citizens to be successful as the people are what keep the province running, keep the economy moving, and actually do the things that taxpayers are paying for. It's time to stop thinking we can financially cripple the people of the province and be successful. Teachers cannot fix the system without money, nor should they be expected to. Teachers appear to mean very little to McNeil, despite being essential and the backbone to every community. We all learn from teachers, so much more than just algebra we might never use as adults. It's beyond time we give teachers the tools they need to help students find success and to curtail the damage done to the education system by Karen Casey's attempts to create a legacy for herself. The consequences of a deteriorating system have already been too pervasive as our youth struggle to adjust to the demands of secondary education and a workforce that expects accountability, responsibility, pride in one's work, as well as basic math, reading and writing skills. These are all elements of education that are no longer steadily instilled in students as the system, as steered by the so-called expertise of Karen Casey and co., continues to tie the hands of teachers and undermine the quality of education that students are able to receive. It's time to stop saying that kids are slipping through the cracks of the education system when in reality we are pushing them all off a cliff and somehow expecting them to fly. One cannot succeed inside or outside the classroom without being taught the tools needed to do so; and right now teachers know what the tools are and they know how to use them, but they're being taken out of their hands and thrown in the trash by a government who refuses to acknowledge their worth.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Kanaski