
From: Amanda Winsor [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, February 14, 2017 10:12 AM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: Legislation to Impose a Contract on NS Teachers

Dear Mr. Hebb, Ms. Whalen, and members of the Law Amendment Committee,

I would like to request an opportunity to present, in writing, my views on the Bill which will impose a contract on NS teachers.

I have been a public school teacher in Nova Scotia for the past eleven years. Over the past three years, I have met and spoken with my MLA, Mr. Ben Jessome, many times. I have been frank, open, and honest with him about what I feel is needed to help stop the further erosion of public education in Nova Scotia, and also about what I feel is needed to promote a holistic approach to desperately needed educational reform. I have made suggestions. I have offered professional insight. I have arranged for him to hear directly from a wide range of other public educators. I have helped facilitate communication between teachers and the Minister of Education. In fact, following one meeting I had with Mr. Jessome, he composed a very comprehensive letter to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development that clearly outlined not only my concerns for the state of public education in Nova Scotia, but what I believe are the concerns of 9300 other educators in this province. In light of this, I do not feel compelled to list those concerns again here today. I do sincerely hope that the Minister gave that letter the time and reflection it deserved, though I have many reasons to doubt this. I have rallied, emailed, Tweeted, attended meetings, filled out surveys, marched, and screamed for help for nearly four years. I am tired, but I remain determined. I am angry, but I am more resolved than ever to stay in this fight.

I am here today to express to you my firm and unwavering objection to this Bill which would impose a contract on NS teachers. A good place to begin in helping you understand my objections to this Bill is an explanation of why I feel that it will have a profoundly negative effect on the relationship between teachers and government. I firmly believe that a healthy working relationship between teachers and government is essential to the quality, sustainability, and future success of our public education system. And, as I so often tell my students, in any healthy relationship trust must be at the forefront; a mutual value that defines the character of each individual participating in that relationship.

In addition to trust, there must also be reciprocity, or a willingness to compromise and give as well as take, respect, and responsibility. These four qualities must form the foundation of a healthy working relationship which empowers all stakeholders to do whatever is necessary to support the wellbeing of those it serves.

With this being said, I am compelled to object, in the strongest and most absolute terms, to the enactment of any Act Respecting a Teacher's Professional Agreement, as it would essentially finalize a long and painful process that has seen the illegal and unconstitutional stripping-away of the right to fair and collective bargaining, including mediation, binding arbitration, and legal job action, that is guaranteed to NS teachers in the Teacher's Collective Bargaining Agreement. This is in direct violation of workers' rights, it is an affront to the democratic process, and its' proposed enactment is a stain on the character of our elected Premier and his government. This Bill will effectively stifle, for many years to come, any chance of restoration and reconciliation in the relationship between all public service employees, not merely teachers, and the employer, our provincial government. It demonstrates a complete disregard for the value of reciprocity, is entirely disrespectful to workers, and is frankly one of the most irresponsible and embarrassing pieces of legislature I have ever had the misfortune to witness in my lifetime. It will undermine any future gestures of goodwill and cooperation between teachers and government, and it will remain a barrier to educational restoration and reform in our province at a time when both are desperately needed.

As a parent of three school-aged children, and as a public school teacher I implore all Members of Parliament

to vote against this despicable piece of legislation in its' entirety, as it represents an attitude of utter disrespect and clear disdain for the students, parents and teachers of Nova Scotia. The declaration of this Bill will do nothing to promote progress in our schools, it will not help teachers meet the needs of their students, and it will completely destroy an already deeply eroded relationship between teachers and government. It will be an enormous step backwards in what has been an arduous journey for teachers, parents and students to have their voices heard, and will send a clear message to each one of them that their voices do not matter to, and were not heard by, their provincial government. The enactment of this Bill will leave a profoundly negative legacy of having ignored teachers' cries for help, of having abandoned any endeavour to foster a healthy working relationship with teachers, and will leave the most vulnerable of their students with fewer supports than ever to help them succeed and thrive in school.

Finally, the declaration of legislation imposing a contract onto NS teachers will prove absolutely and without question that the Premier and the Liberal Party of Nova Scotia have lied to Nova Scotians with respect to their commitment to protecting collective bargaining rights and workers' right to legal job action in this province. It illustrates that the Premier willfully refuses to work with unions, has never had any intention of honouring the laws protecting workers, and has in fact been waiting for an opportunity to impose a contract on public sector workers which violates their rights and undermines their ability to effectively advocate on behalf of the many vulnerable citizens they serve.

This legislation will have a negative impact on all Nova Scotians for years to come. It will strip workers of their rights, it will facilitate the abandonment of the students of this province by the government, it will foster a spirit of bitterness and resentment among citizens, and will further erode the foundation of our democracy and of our society. If we allow democratically elected governments to abuse their positions of power to the detriment of the citizens they have been granted the great honour of governing, then we allow our collective voice to be silenced and we grant our permission for future abuses to occur.

I would like to close with a quote by Sir John A. MacDonald, and would ask that all in this House take the time to reflect on the call to caution and use of wisdom within it:

"It must be an independent House, having a free action of its own, for it is only valuable as being a regulating body, calmly considering the legislation initiated by the popular branch, and preventing any hasty or ill considered legislation which may come from that body, but it will never set itself in opposition against the deliberate and understood wishes of the people."

(The Right Honourable Sir John A. Macdonald, Parliamentary Debates on Confederation of British North American Provinces [Quebec 1867, Ottawa, 1951], p. 36)

This Bill, as you have heard here today, is in opposition against the deliberate and understood wishes of the people of Nova Scotia. I implore you all to please, vote according to your conscience. Uphold the tenets of democracy. Respect the rights of workers. Respect the people. Keep your honour.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Amanda Winsor