
From: Holly M Laventure [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, February 20, 2017 2:01 PM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: Written submission to LAC re: Bill 75

I am a parent and a teacher. I have taught in the classroom for 11 years and I have a child in public school. The reason I am here to protest this bill, even though the outcome seems inevitable: I know that every single day has been too hard for my students. The temporary loss of extracurriculars cannot compare to the permanent loss of a learning environment where every student truly can succeed. I remember when classrooms were different, but for my students, there has never been enough to go around: not enough time, materials, money, books, attention, enrichment, counselling, resource, equipment. The fact that they believe the current state is normal, is heartbreaking. I can't remember the last time a gifted child received extra support. Or when our amazing EPAs were allocated for academic needs and not only for severe behavioural/medical ones. The wait list for psychological testing is heartbreakingly long. Math resource quietly disappeared. I have not taught a straight grade for 8 years. There used to be a chance that if a class was sitting at 15-ish those kids would get an amazing year with lots of 1:1 attention. Now eight kids from a different grade would be crammed in there because numbers are the only thing that matter. This is the foundation our children are building their futures upon, and they are making do instead of thriving.

I can't blame this government for years of underfunding, but I do blame them for using their mandate to silence us as quickly as the law permits.

Most of you are probably parents, aunts or uncles, grandparents. Please, before you continue this legislation, ask a child: how much time did your teacher spend with you today? How many times did you raise your hand, and not get to speak? What exactly do you do while you are waiting for help? What are some things you need in your classroom?

All day I decide who needs my time the most: a child struggling with a new idea, or one who needs a challenge. A child reading 3-4 grades ahead, or 3-4 grades behind. A child crying because of a bullying incident, or the one whose behaviour is disrupting half the class. Our education system should not be based on triage.

Our education system also should not rely on good will, volunteerism and charity to function properly. I have purchased thousands of dollars worth of books. Bins to store them in. The funding this government thinks is appropriate for books would not be sufficient for a day's worth of reading instruction, let alone a year. I've purchased art supplies for sculpting, printmaking, charcoal drawing. Cushions because some of my students are sitting on overturned milk crates. BLANKETS because some of the rooms I have taught in are either blisteringly hot or icy cold, no in between. Materials for every science unit there is. I have bought food for hungry students, clothing for refugee families, diapers for their little brothers and sisters. Computers so I can use the repetitive, cumbersome programs the government insists I use, despite the fact that they won't RUN on the decades-old software in my classroom. Like every single one of my colleagues, I have spent weekends planning and marking and not with my family. I have bought books on spelling and reading instruction, and read them on my own time to better my teaching when updated curriculum and PD were not available. And yet I've been provided with coding PD. I've never had a parent say to me, "I really wish my child had MORE screen time." This government says they are listening, but they are not listening to us.

I have crouched under a piano with a violent child suffering from trauma so severe that safe interactions with classmates were impossible. I have seen furniture thrown, benches flipped. I have personally arranged for medical care for a child with an undiagnosed condition. That child had been in school for years and was still on the waiting list, still receiving no support and being treated like a behaviour problem. I have helped families get oil in winter. I have protected students from non custodial parents and from vicious homophobic attacks. I have learned phrases in other languages so I could at least greet new EAL students on their first day. I teach elementary school. I have had overwhelming support from colleagues, administrators, the union,

parents, and my family. And from this government? Under Stephen McNeil, this government has taken every cliched easy shot against teachers they can, not to better a single thing, but to score political points among voters who have no stake in education. They would tell you that I am greedy and entitled, because it polled well. Our rights, and our children's rights, have been sold for the promise of a handful of votes.

I am the person who comforts your child when they are hurt and excluded. I look your son in the eye after a lockdown drill and promise I will keep him safe. Your daughter asks me for help when she drops her lunch on the floor or has her first period. I teach them how to multiply and divide even when they swear they can't do it. I make sure they wear their warm hats and have breakfast and use their calm down strategies. You leave the most precious things you have with me, and entrust me to act *in loco parentis*. I am not a money grubbing drain on society.

I don't say this to remind you of my "sacrifices." I don't resent a single minute or dollar I've spent on your kids. I resent being ignored by the McNeil government - the only people in a position to implement change. Our kids have been missing out for YEARS. Teachers aren't sick of the "extras." We've been holding down the fort with them, until extra could never possibly be enough.

The government says, "But we have no money." I disagree, but even if that were true they could always have implemented low- and no-cost solutions in good faith. At any time! Drop the forced PLC meetings and the requirement for me to write a book report afterwards to prove it happened. I guarantee that extra planning time will make a difference in the classroom. Stop spending our time on data collection to "accredit" our schools. Which have already been "accredited" at least once. All our schools now look like they are succeeding on paper, but we want our students to succeed in real life. Our time may seem like a free resource, but students are the ones paying.

The fact that this legislation is punitive in nature, designed to hurt teachers for not complying with the government's threats, is devastating. This government already demonstrated in tentative agreement 3 that it could afford far more than is offered in this fourth contract. Where is that extra money and why is it not earmarked for students? Why are we being punished for whistleblowing?

I don't like complaining and I've always been willing to roll up my sleeves and do what I can. I've never been ashamed to ask for free styrofoam trays at the grocery store so my kids can do an experiment. I wasn't ashamed to ask for discount on whiteboards at Home Depot so I could afford a class set. Today, I am ashamed of my representation in the Legislature.

I'm here today to speak for the students who are waiting unconscionably long times for support. For the students who quietly slide from an A to a B because they're not disruptive enough to demand attention over all the other disruptions. For the parents who have been reassured that a split class, which we are supposed to cheerfully call a combined class, is a good thing and not a cheap thing. I'm here today to say, that rolling up my sleeves and pitching in is no longer enough. The education system has deteriorated enough in my 11 years that where I used to feel like I was able to do good, now I only make things slightly less bad. When will the government pitch in?

This bill accomplishes nothing to improve education in Nova Scotia. This government cannot force us back to work because we never stopped teaching. Premier McNeil is only attempting to silence the teachers on the front lines. It should be called the Shut Up and Be Quiet Act. We will not be silenced.

I urge the committee to delay this legislation until real improvements can be implemented: not discussed, explored or examined but PUT IN PLACE. If it is an emergency to make teachers accept a wage pattern, surely it must be more of an emergency that students are no longer assured decent learning conditions. Choose any one of these solutions and watch the effects ripple:

- Stop combining grades in one room.
- Provide EPA support for every student on documented adaptations.
- Cap junior high and high school classes.
- Increase resource and learning centre positions at each school.
- Give principals autonomy to decide how many staff they need to properly arrange their classes.
- Give teachers autonomy to identify what PD they need, what pace their students need to learn at, what materials will spark a love of learning.
- Give teachers a classroom budget that compares to an MLA office budget.
- Place a full time counsellor at each school.

Stripping our contract of legally negotiated benefits was a drastic statement and we demand an equally bold investment in our students if we are to begin to understand and tolerate this dishonourable treatment.

Finally, our one-day job action will save the department of education millions of dollars in salary. These unused wages should also be directly returned to the classroom to improve conditions for our students.

Thank you.

Holly Laventure
Sent from my iPhone