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Law Amendments Submission
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Twenty years ago last month, I first became involved as a parent in public education when I woke up before dawn in order to register my older daughter for school. If all goes as planned, I will close out that involvement this coming June as I watch her younger sister graduate from high school.

In that 20 years. I have been an involved parent - I have volunteered as a class parent, chaperoned field trips, run the school safe arrival program, spearheaded fundraising, spent 5 years as PTA treasurer, served two terms on a school advisory council, spent 3 years trying to organize a coalition of SACs across HRSB, spent 4 years serving as an HRSB school board member, and was an active member of several committees of the Nova Scotia School Boards Association.

I'm here today as a citizen and a parent, but also as someone who has direct knowledge of our education system on both the micro and macro level.

I'd like to think I could tell you what I've learned over the past 20 years and some of you would shout "Eureka" and this bill would be shelved and a better one written, but we all know that is unlikely to happen. I even wish I could suggest some tweaks that would improve the bill, but the flaws in this bill are so fundamental that I don't think that is possible.

First, I've read the Glaze Report and I know I am not alone in seeing problems with it. The recommendation to eliminate the seven English governing school boards is poorly supported by the evidence gathered for her report and the indecent haste in which these changes are being implemented is even more poorly supported. Many people including Dr David Mackinnon and Dr Michael Corbett of Acadia have identified problems with data analysis in the Glaze Report - this alone should be enough to cause the legislation to be paused.

I do not, however, question Dr Glaze's conclusions that there are weaknesses and flaws in how the school boards have operated nor that there are serious problems in the relationship between the boards and the department of Education. I had high hopes when this review was first announced that we would see in the final report a clarification of the roles and responsibilities of both parties that would eliminate much of the unhealthy friction and distrust that has existed and thus lead to a more effective school system for the students of Nova Scotia. Alas, the adopted recommendation to eliminate the English boards is a facile solution that takes inconvenience away from the elected government and civil service at the expense of

the public.

I've recently heard the relationship between teachers and principals compared to a marriage. Well, the relationship between governing school boards and the minister could be described that way as well. Only, instead of it being an equitable type marriage, a modern healthy marriage, where both parties support each other and arguments lead to compromise and understanding, this relationship resembles 17th century marriage where one party is empowered with total control over the other. And the proposed solution to improving that power imbalance is to obliterate the weaker partner. How on Earth does that make sense?

The Glaze report gives a cursory mention of the new governance framework document that has just been released by the Nova Scotia School Boards Association. I was privileged to have been a member for a short time of the committee responsible for creating that framework. Unlike the Glaze Report, this report took two years to complete, it shows clear links between the research on which it's based and its recommendations and it is specific to a Nova Scotia context. This framework has the potential to make school boards more effective for students and to improve student achievement.

What you would never guess from the short shift it has been given in Dr Glaze's report is that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development was involved in this work from the very beginning. The school boards association looked for and obtained buy-in from the minister before the work was even begun. They updated the Minister and the Deputy Minister on numerous occasions on the work as it progressed over those two years. The department leadership was very aware of this project. Why was all of this department-approved work discarded in favour of the eradication of school boards?

Why? And why do it so quickly?

Is it a coincidence that these changes are being rushed into law before the report of the Inclusion Committee with its recommendations is delivered?

Is it a coincidence that the current government ran on a platform where they said they wanted to review school administration but that the Liberal party had quietly passed a resolution to eliminate governing school boards at their 2016 AGM the year before?

Is it a coincidence that school board members have increasingly and inconveniently pushed back privately and in public on politically-driven decisions by the department, decisions about school closures and school construction?

There were some wonderful speeches Friday in the debate following the second reading of the Education bill. But was any one in the House listening? There will be amazing and heartfelt submissions made by the public today. But none of them will mean anything without your action.

As a former school board member, I had the honor and responsibility of making decisions at the board table. We held our debates in the public eye. We made our decisions in real time swayed by the arguments of our colleagues. I saw people change their minds through debate and I had my mind changed as well.

You all have the same individual power and responsibility as representatives of the people. You can listen to the arguments and stop the progress of this very foolhardy bill. You just have to choose to use your power.