

[REDACTED]

From: Karen Beazley [REDACTED]
Sent: March 3, 2025 5:10 PM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Cc: Premier; MLA Office; Claudia Chender
Subject: Submission to Public Bills Committee regarding Bill 1
Attachments: Bill 1 Submission to Public Bills Committee 03Mar2025 Beazley.pdf

**** EXTERNAL EMAIL / COURRIEL EXTERNE ****

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Dear Office of the Legislative Counsel,
Please find attached (pdf) my written submission to Law Amendments Committee (now Public Bills Committee) regarding Bill 1.
If you need anything further, please let me know.

All the best and thanks,
Karen Beazley

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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Dalhousie sits on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq nation. We are all Treaty people.

We acknowledge the histories, contributions, and legacies of the African Nova Scotian people and communities who have been here for over 400 years.

March 3, 2025

Office of the Legislative Counsel
Halifax NS B3J 2X1
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Re: Submission on Bill 1

Hon. Members of the Public Bills Committee,

I am writing to express my concerns, ask questions, and urge you to recommend that Bill 1 be withdrawn or deeply amended. I have grave concerns about the Bill as a whole, as well as many of its individual provisions.

First, I applaud Premier Houston for retracting the clauses related to the Auditor General in Bill 1. Those clauses are highly concerning as they would give the government the power to dismiss the Auditor General without cause and to withhold and redact their report under vague conditions. If enacted, they would represent an alarming abdication of financial accountability and transparency. Such changes would not align with most other provinces in Canada and would have aligned us most closely with those that have similarly problematic provisions.

I also welcome the Premier's indication that this government will work with Freedom of Information Office to find better ways to address their concerns about managing the number of requests for information. Accordingly, those associated clauses should be retracted from Bill 1.

Despite these important retractions, other clauses in Bill 1 remain highly problematic for democracy. If enacted, Bill 1 would still grant the government the power to, for example:

- dismiss non-unionized civil servants without cause;
- restrict citizens from influencing bills through Law Amendments Committee;
- dismantle Communications NS;
- limit media engagement;
- over-ride municipal powers and decision-making; and,
- repeal the fixed election date legislation.

I urge you to please recommend to the legislature that Bill 1 be withdrawn altogether or, at a minimum, that these problematic clauses be retracted or amended. Such impactful changes warrant broader public discussion. These provisions in Bill 1 were not part of the Premier's or his party's election platform. The government does not have a mandate from the people of Nova Scotia to make these wide sweeping changes that negatively impact democracy itself.

It is evident from the tremendous push back from citizens, members of the legislature, leader of the opposition, media, the Auditor General and Office of Freedom and Information that you do not have the support of the public for these bills. The content of this bill was largely kept from the public and the media prior to the sitting of the legislature. The bill was fast-forwarded through first and second readings in the legislature, with little opportunity for prior or current input and feedback and limited time for discussion and debate within the legislature. That the media was and is not being engaged except under strictly government-controlled settings away from the legislature was and remains highly problematic. Individually and in totality, these practices and this Bill represent egregious denials of transparency, accountability and democratic processes by this government and the Premier.

The bill also reverses the government's own fixed-election-date legislation and earlier election promise. Further, it aims to do away with the non-partisan Communications NS and make changes to the Freedom of Information Act to enable the refusal of applications on poorly defined grounds with much discretion. All of these represent dangerous precedents for accountability, transparency and democracy itself. They serve only to increase secrecy, control and power. Such proposed changes warrant broader public discussion.

Though problematic in and of itself, Bill 1 is even more worrisome in the context of other Bills introduced in this session, such as Bills 6, 12, and 24. When read in tandem with these other bills, Bill 1 is setting the stage for extending and over-reaching the powers of the provincial government into other jurisdictional authorities and realms, such as municipalities, universities, and the media.

At the same time, Bill 1, together with others, sets the stage for limiting local-public and municipal input into resource extractions and other developments, whereas it is these very same local people and governments that will pay the costs in terms of impacts on their communities, lands, waters, and other land-use opportunities. Indeed, it aims to limit any form of opposing viewpoint, be that from citizens, scientists, municipalities, or media.

Accordingly, Bill 1 raises fundamental questions that erode my trust in this government and the Premier.

- Why is this government reducing the ability of Nova Scotians to understand, question and provide input into democratic processes that threaten transparency, accountability and democracy itself?
- Why did this government dismantle Communications NS and want to make changes to the Freedom of Information Act that give broad provision to dismiss and ignore requests on vague and subjective grounds?
- Why has this government back-tracked on its own fixed-election date legislation?
- Why is it attempting to limit the powers of municipalities?

- Why is the Premier and this government in such a rush to push through changes to structures and processes that are fundamental to democracy without adequate public discussion and negotiations?
- Will the members of this legislature be happy that future governments have such powers, when your time is through?

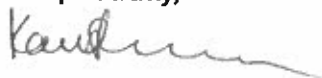
By swiftly introducing wide-sweeping changes such as those in this Bill, it is difficult for citizens like me to understand the full implications and respond to them under the tight timeline. I cannot help but assume that this is the intent. And, indeed, the Premier more-or-less admits that this is the case. The Premier has indicated that he wants to act quickly and then clean up his mistakes if that's what they turn out to be. I submit that this Bill is a mistake. It should have been withdrawn before getting to this point in the process.

The changes introduced in this Bill are irresponsible and represent nothing less than a poorly disguised power grab. They represent a bait-and-switch approach to elections and governance. They erode faith and trust in government, in the Premier and MLAs that support this deeply concerning Bill.

If enacted, this Bill (and others) would set up an *us-versus-them* situation in Nova Scotia. As such, it would place this Premier and his government squarely among the those that are "problem creators," a group that the Premier seemed to forget about in his simplistic false dichotomy of problem solvers and problem stretchers.

I urge you to recommend that Bill 1 be withdrawn. Instead, this government should work with knowledgeable and credible people to address the concerns that it is trying address through this flawed and unpalatable bill. At minimum, it requires deep amendments to address or retract these most egregious clauses.

Respectfully,



Karen F. Beazley



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