

[REDACTED]

From: Chantal Gagnon [REDACTED]
Sent: March 14, 2025 1:37 PM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: Monday March 17th, Public Bills Committee - Written Submission
Attachments: PublicBillsCommitteeMarch172025Bill1.pdf

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Dear Public Bills Committee,

Please find attached in PDF format my written submission regarding Bill 1 - An Act Respecting Government Organization and Administration.

I have also copied the text below if that is the prefer format to send it in.

Regards
Chantal Gagnon
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Monday March 17 2025 – Public Bills Committee

Regarding: Bill 1 - An Act Respecting Government Organization and Administration

Dear Members of the Public Bills Committee,

I humbly request that you greatly modify Bill 1 and do not let it become law as it is currently written. As a Nova Scotian with years of experience following international political situations, this Bill will take us closer to losing our ability to be truthfully informed by government and maintain our democracy.

As described in scientific literature, reports from international development organizations observing conflicts and governance issues, and advisory groups reporting on democratic governance, a growing number of democracies around the world have been moving towards autocracy. This happens through the use of deceptive tactics and confusing information provided to the public by groups of people who gain more power

and money by doing so. Once that misinformation is spread, the next step is to make systematic changes to laws and institutions. This becomes a crucial part of making it easier for these people to control not only information, but also the capacity of citizens to be involved in the decision making. This favors centralizing power and money in the hands of a few, who ultimately will not shy away from using intimidation and disinformation to maintain their authority, and renders the common citizen less powerful.

Bill 1 does this by implementing four of the six basic steps taken by autocrats to transform their democracies into autocracies. These are:

Eroding Checks and Balances (Clauses 1,2,3, 4, 6, 9 and 10): By weakening the independence of a judiciary, a legislature, or another oversight body the executive branch of government is permitted to consolidate power into the hands of a few people. These clauses do exactly that. They reduce the transparency and accountability of government and increase protection to those who would manipulate the system to their advantage over that of Nova Scotians.

Curtailling Free Elections (Clause 11) : By refusing to put in a fixed election date as promised, this clause makes it possible to manipulate electoral laws, can suppress voter turnout by creating unpredictability, and can undermine the fairness of elections by throwing opposition parties off balance. A fixed election date makes it a more equal playing field, keeps the government accountable and more democratic. Clause 11 of Bill 1 makes it easier for any ruling government to stay in power.

Restricting Civil Liberties: When the executive branch of government starts limiting freedom of speech, press, and assembly this stifles dissent and public discourse. These are fundamental elements of a democracy and essential for its functioning. We are not there yet, but Bill 1 is a stepping stone towards this reality because of its control of information and actions currently taken by the political party with a House majority.

Controlling Information (Clauses 16,17,18, 19, 20, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33,34): This aspect is crucial to manipulating public opinion and muzzling truthful facts. Executive branches of governments intending to increase their authority over decision making will spread propaganda or restrict access to independent media in order to create an environment where citizens are less informed and more susceptible to manipulation. Restricting the application of access to information laws, delaying its implementation or limiting the decision as to whether requests are approved in the hands of a few potentially biased individuals is compromising citizens ability to be informed. In recent months we have seen the majority political party in the House act in ways to circumvent the press, use publicity to convince citizens, and curtail the sharing of information. By dissolving Communications Nova Scotia, a government agency that was created to "ensure that government communications are timely, accurate, effective, factual and respectful, objective and non-partisan", the current government's executive has taken a first step to further the impact of its own propaganda. It has also been labelling concerned citizens as "special interest groups" and been asking it's party members to fund campaigns that help it avoid the media. These actions combined to these clauses in Bill 1 make it very obvious what will happen to the ability of Nova Scotians to be informed in a timely, accurate and factual manner; and

when combined with Bill 12, make very challenging for citizens to receive accurate scientifically proven information that does not align with a ruling party's views. Bill 1 is a massive effort to control information.

Expanding Executive Powers (Clause 36, 38, 67): These clauses make it possible to grant excessive powers to the executive branch. When combined with Bills 6 and 12, among others, and accompanied by a public campaign that we are under some sort of emergency, it makes it easier for a majority political party to put into effect an authoritarian approach to governance.

Undermining Rule of Law: This step is when governments get to the point of corrupting legal systems or selectively enforcing laws that can erode trust in democratic institutions. The combination of multiple Bills currently before the House of Assembly, such as Bills 1, 6 and 12 among others, can lead to this situation. Bill 1 is the most powerful one in setting the steps to make this happen.

These six steps are all part of moving away from democracy and towards autocracy. Bill 1 is implementing a huge number of these steps. When combined with actions already taken by the majority political party in government, and other Bills submitted this session, the picture of the shift in decision making power becomes obvious.

There are many other sections of Bill 1, such as clauses 35 and 36, which are problematic for citizens to know whether these are a positive or negative step for our province without expert knowledge. I trust others will provide information on these clauses. However, with the quantity of democratically threatening clauses in Bill 1, it is hard to trust that any other component of the Bill is valid.

Regardless of the political party that you joined and why, or the quantity of misinformation that you believe, these facts will not change. If you approve Bill 1 without removing these clauses you will make it possible for Nova Scotia to become an autocracy. You will shift the balance of power from the people, to the elite with the most finances, and you will return Nova Scotia to the way it was a century ago. Nova Scotians never asked for this Bill and we do not need it. Please remove from it all the clauses indicated in this letter or simply do not pass Bill 1.

Sincerely,

Chantal Gagnon

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