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From: Bruce Manion [REDACTED]
Sent: March 17, 2025 1:38 PM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Cc: Claudia Chender
Subject: My Submission to the Public Bills Committee on Bill 1
Attachments: BManion Submission on Bill 1 Mar 17 2025.pdf

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Good afternoon,

I phoned your office earlier today to confirm that I would not be able to make my scheduled presentation to the Public Bills Committee at 12:10 p.m. due to a health issue.

As directed by your office, I hereby submit my comments on Bill 1 for consideration by the Committee.

I wish them fruitful deliberations.

Many Thanks,



Bruce Manion FCPA

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Submission to the Standing Committee on Public Bills

March 17th, 2025

Submitted by: Bruce P. Manion FCPA

Madam Chair, Honourable Committee Members,

Please accept this submission for your consideration in your review of Bill 1, an Act Respecting Government Organization and Administration. I was scheduled to present my views to you in Committee on this date but was unable to attend due to a significant medical issue. While I sincerely regret not being able to deliver these concerns in person and engage with you in response to your questions, I am grateful for this opportunity to share my views regarding this legislation.

My name is Bruce Manion, and I would have been presenting my views today as an individual. However, my many recent conversations with my fellow Nova Scotians, both in person and through various media, have shown that my thoughts on these matters are fairly widely shared.

I am a former federal public servant, having worked for over 30 years in Ottawa on a wide range of issues. I am a Fellow of CPA Nova Scotia and have played every role in finance, from auditor to CFO. My last CFO position was in the largest expenditure based federal department, overseeing just over \$100 billion in annual expenditures. I have set up new federal organizations, sewn some together and even closed some down. I have led numerous government-wide initiatives on various important policy issues and have represented Canada abroad in many discussions pertaining to public sector management and accountability. I have overseen the skunkworks of a great many core government activities in finance, policy, planning, performance reporting, risk management, access to information and privacy, audit and evaluation, and information technology. During the last two years of my career, I was privileged to be the Public Servant in Residence at Dalhousie University, where I taught, among other courses, the MPA course on Government Organization and Operation. I was also a faculty member of the DAL Senate and mentored many graduate students, including one who was just named to the Federal Cabinet last Friday. I am also proud to say that a team of students under my guidance took second place at the National Student Policy Case Study Competition put on by CAPP and IPAC.

My father was a 40-year career public servant. He rose from the operational ranks of the Immigration Department to become its Deputy Minister and went on to become the longest serving Secretary of the Treasury Board of Canada and was the Associate Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Federal Cabinet. His final assignment was as the founding Principal of the Canadian Center for Management Development, established to conduct research into and teach a broad curriculum covering the practice of modern public sector management.

You could say that Public Service was our family business, a business that I know extremely well.

Before I share my specific thoughts on Bill 1, I would like to state that I am shocked and appalled by this Government's recent spate of legislation and, more importantly, its tone and behaviour toward the citizens of this province and some of the institutions and concepts that are the foundation of our form of Westminster Parliamentary Government. Taken in their entirety, these bills come off as an overt attack on government transparency and accountability and an extreme over-reach by the Executive to consolidate its power and shield itself from being held to account by and to the people of this province. Further, some of Premier Houston's recent comments about committed and engaged Nova Scotians, dedicated to ensuring a sustainable and bright future for this province, smack of bullying. A full-page attack style advertisement in the Chronicle Herald, attacking your own electorate – REALLY? This is not how you rally citizens to stand together to face an external threat, but it is a sure-fire way of getting a large component of the population to take note, become concerned and wonder if their newly-elected government is acting in an ethical way with their best interests at heart. I was out on the street in front of the legislature on March the 5th. The rather large crowd, which mobilized on very short notice, was not there to show solidarity against the enemy without, but rather against a newly perceived enemy within.

I will now turn my attention to 5 specific elements of Bill 1.

My first comments concern the clauses pertaining to changes to the Auditor General Act and the many clauses proposing changes to Freedom of Information and Privacy processes and procedures at both the provincial and municipal levels. We have been told by the Premier that these clauses are to be removed from the Bill or significantly altered. I seriously question the ethics and effectiveness of any public process that allows for consultation on such a clearly moving and badly defined target.

In my view, both of these sets of clauses are unnecessary and extremely ill-advised. In both cases, they undermine the independence and credibility of these key processes without any real benefit to government or taxpayers. They do so by introducing poorly defined and highly subjective criteria that will, in my expert opinion, have the ultimate effect of restricting the flow of information to Nova Scotians. Further, they were not drafted based on any meaningful consultations with any recognized expert bodies, the offices of primary interest, or the community writ large. This was not an attempt to level up, but rather to level down. In my opinion, terms like trivial, frivolous, vexatious, in bad faith and interfering with the operations of a public body, when meant to describe the efforts of taxpayers, academics or the press to obtain information about the government, have no place in a healthy democracy.

I therefore urge this Committee to unanimously recommend that these clauses be totally removed from this Bill.

One of the cornerstones of our form of Responsible Government is a Professional, Permanent and Non-Partisan Public Service. I was raised on and lived by the public service motto of “Fearless recommendation and loyal implementation”. The clauses in this Bill that touch on public service employment are, quite frankly, embarrassing. At a time when we need every drop of inspiration and perspiration from our professional public service to face the threats in and to our environment, do we really want to put forward a clause that allows some of our most experienced and knowledgeable people to feel that they can be fired on a whim? To quote a recent newspaper ad, someone needs to give their head a shake.

The communication sent recently by the Premier to all public servants was demeaning and could be seen as a bullying tactic. I can safely say that any such attempt by a sitting Prime Minister to attack and demonize the professional and non-partisan federal public service would have been met by strong pushback from the Clerk of the Privy Council and Head of the Public Service. A number of Clerks have been known to resign or at least threaten to tender their resignation in face of any such priministerial belligerence.

Do yourselves a favour, Honourable Committee Members, and recommend that this clause be dropped from this legislation (and maybe get the Premier to do a *mea culpa* on this and apologize to the public service).

My next comments pertain to the clause removing fixed date elections in the province. When fixed date elections were enacted by the current Government, as its first piece of legislation during its first term, the Premier stated that the ultimate goal was to level the playing field, by removing any unfair advantage held by the party in power, and to allow for better planning and management of the electoral process, thus saving taxpayers money. The excuse for breaking his own election law, that he needed to have a new mandate to fight Ottawa, was as flimsy as the current excuse for repealing hard-fought legislation on limitations to fracking and uranium exploration or for not proclaiming and implementing the Coastal Protection Act. The explanation that fixed election dates won't work is somewhat laughable given that the very first time a fixed election date came into play, the Premier who suggested it defied his own logic and chose electoral opportunism to stay in power.

I won't mention the fact that the current government enjoys a super majority in the Legislature while only having received less than 24% of the eligible provincial vote, a significant weakness in our electoral process that should be tackled as a pressing priority for our government.

I recommend that Nova Scotians be allowed to once again have faith in their electoral process and that this clause be removed.

Lastly, I wish to comment on the clauses that would give Executive Council Members the power to enter into many types of agreements without the need for a Governor in Council approval. As Orders in Council are in effect the actual records of decision of government, this power runs contrary to the very basis of Responsible Government and government accountability. Should these clauses pass, there would be no way for anyone to know about government agreements subject to this new power, unless the government decides to announce them. So much for

transparency and accountability. Joseph Howe, not to mention my late father, must be rolling in their graves! And to think this is being put forward in the birthplace of Responsible Government in the British colonies.

I again urge you to recommend that these clauses be dropped in their entirety.

Honourable Committee Members, lately we have heard from the Premier and his Government about the lazy policy decisions of past governments. I can only say that policy that is made without effective consultation and analysis, or that on its face appears to attack the basic tenets and tools of government transparency and accountability, is not only reckless, but also dangerous. We need only look to our neighbours to the south to see how democracy unravels in real time.

It is further alarming for our Premier to double down on his bad policy decisions only to walk back on them a few days later in the face of public uproar, like a kid caught with their hand in the cookie jar. His comments that this is somehow proof that he listens to Nova Scotians are laughable considering the number of these walk-backs and the fact that most are concerning issues that weren't included in his party's electoral platform of less than six months ago.

In summary, this legislation, as it currently stands, seeks to say NO to our Auditor General and their true independence, NO to parties wanting government information, NO to self-respect and a feeling of security in employment to some of our most skilled and trusted public servants, NO to a level electoral playing field and cost-effective elections, and NO to visibility into government dealings and agreements signed by Executive Council. I humbly ask; ***"WHO IS REALLY PUTTING THE "NO" IN NOVA SCOTIA?"***

Finally, there is an old Dutch saying that goes: ***"Trust arrives on foot but flees on horseback"***. I kindly ask, Honourable Committee Members, that you give these matters good hard consideration and sober second thought, before the horse bolts.

NOVA SCOTIANS ARE WATCHING!!!

Thank you for your time and would have loved to answer your questions.

RESPECTFULLY,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bruce Manion', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bruce Manion FCPA

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