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From: Nancy Saunders [REDACTED]
Sent: March 17, 2025 10:19 AM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: Fwd: Submission to the Public Bills Committee Bill # 1 An Act Respecting Government Organization and Administration.
Attachments: Committee on Public Bills March 17 2025_N Saunders_Bill 1 final.pdf

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see below submission
Nancy Saunders

----- Forwarded [REDACTED] -----

[REDACTED]

Date: Sun, Mar 16, 2025 at 8:11 PM
Subject: Submission to the Public Bills Committee Bill # 1 An Act Respecting Government Organization and Administration.
To: <legcomm@novascotia.ca>

Honorable Chair of the Public Bills Committee:

Please see the attached submission relating to Bill No. 1 – An Act Respecting Government Organization and Administration.

I wish to speak, so I will call the Legislative Council Office Monday March 17, 2025 to make that request.

Sincerely,
Nancy Saunders
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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Nancy Saunders
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Chair, Public Bills Committee
Committee Room
Granville Level
One Government Place
1700 Granville Street
Halifax

March 14, 2025

(via email)

Honorable Chair and Committee Members:

My name is Nancy Saunders, I appear here today to speak as an individual citizen of Nova Scotia, with regards to Bill No. 1 – An Act Respecting Government Organization and Administration. My written submission contains more information than my time here may allow so I will focus on the most important items.

Bill #1 is an omnibus bill designed to hide things from Nova Scotians and those directly impacted by these changes and was done with little, if any, consultation.

This bill attempts to amend the Auditor General Act, the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act, the Municipal Government Act, The Civil Service Act, the Privacy Review Officer Act, and the Election Act, among others. This bill eliminates the 2 century old Law Amendments process and replaces it with a much more consolidated process resulting in less time for scrutiny by stakeholders, citizens and groups directly impacted by proposed laws. It eliminates the ability for MLAS to gather input from their constituents and more Nova Scotians to be able to make representation on government bills to the Law Amendments committee.

While this is a diverse list of Acts contained in Bill # 1, there is a common theme in these proposed amendments. They all serve to lessen accountability for the government and the oversight of government by removing powers of independent agencies and allowing government to cover up information that should be made public.

This government wanted a clear mandate in the recent election which was given to them by Nova Scotians : Healthcare, Affordability and Housing. What are the elements in these amendments that directly relate to those priorities? There are none that I can see.

I invite you all to read the original intent and purpose of these Acts that Bill 1 is attempting to amend. You will find that these amendments go completely against the original purpose of these pieces of legislation. If there is a reason to question the intent and purpose of Nova Scotia Legislation, the responsible and democratic way of examining that is to do a complete review of the entire act with very wide and deep consultation in order to make these types of changes.

Included in this Bill is the ability to fire the Auditor General without cause and allow government to keep certain reports of the Auditor General confidential, when these reports should be made public. In the Peoples House the Auditor General is the independent officer of the Legislature so the ability to fire the Auditor General or withhold reports that should be made public has one purpose; to lessen the accountability for the decisions of this government and to withhold information that should be made public.

I believe the ability to fire the auditor general (Clause 1) has been walked back due to intense public pressure, **but the ability to withhold Auditor General reports from the public must also be removed; Clauses 2-7.**

Under changes to the Civil Service Act included in this bill, non-unionized employees; a large portion of the public service, can be let go without cause. This is comparable to what is happening south of the border. This allows government to ignore advice and experience of public servants and implement changes that go against public policy and the rights of Nova Scotians. **Clauses 9-10 must be removed.**

Bill # 1 will amend the Elections Act to eliminate the fixed election date. It was made law initially because it would benefit the government at that time, and now being withdrawn because it won't benefit them now. What Nova Scotians want doesn't seem to matter to this government. **Clause 11 must be eliminated.**

The FOIPOP amendments under Bill 1 allow government to dismiss any request they deem to be frivolous or vexatious. That is convenient for a government who does not want any public scrutiny. **Clauses 16-21 must be removed** in order to keep intact the right of Nova Scotians' to freedom of information and protection of privacy.

The Municipal Government Act, is being amended under Bill 1, again to allow the dismissal of any FOIPOP request that a Municipality deems to be frivolous or vexatious. For the same reasons as above, **Clauses 29-33 must be removed.**

The Privacy Review Officer Act is being amended under Bill 1 to allow the Privacy Officer to disregard frivolous or vexatious privacy complaints and to be able to decline to conduct or discontinue privacy complaints in certain circumstances, subject to judicial review. **Clauses 34-36 must be removed for the same reasons stated above.**

The Mandate given to this government by Nova Scotians was not to create more power for majority governments, eliminate independent bodies and agencies who hold government to account, to narrow the information that can be requested from government and to be able to fire anyone who gets in their way. It was not to control our Universities and their boards, or to put our environment in even more danger with regards to the dropping of the Coastal Protection Act.

I listened to the legislative videos on all of the debates and questions on the Bills mentioned in this submission and I read the Hansard notes on the remaining bills put forward in this legislative session. In some instances, as with Bill # 1, the government argued that they “are just bringing Nova Scotia in line with other provinces and they are just doing what Nova Scotians have been asking for”. The first part of that statement is extremely hypocritical as will be explained in the next paragraph and I am not sure what Nova Scotians they have been listening to, but it sure isn’t the majority of Nova Scotians.

Nova Scotians have been asking for a change to the health information law which currently creates barriers to allowing caregivers and the medical system to work collaboratively in keeping individuals living with mental illness and addictions and others safe. This law was put forward twice, under Bill 474 in September 2024 and under Bill 46 in February 2025, and this gov’t refuses to support it. This is a law that would improve health care, save money, and **put Nova Scotia in line with every other province and territory in Canada**. This law would enable a more collaborative and compassionate health care system and would reduce Nova Scotia’s rate of suicide (156 a year) which is the highest in Atlantic Canada. Instead this government is focused only on what is good for them; consolidate power and reduce the ability for public scrutiny.

After recent Halifax stabbings by a very mentally ill young woman, the premier stated very publically that the woman should be locked up behind bars. This demonstrates this government’s significant lack of understanding of severe mental illness and the drastic state that Nova Scotia’s mental health system is in. Yet this government dismisses a law change that would enable many improvements, improve patient outcomes, and save lives.

The individual impact of each of the bills being put forward by this government for this session is very concerning, but their combined impact is a threat to our democracy and our ability to hold government to account. This is how the absolutely shocking and very dangerous situation

south of our border started. This is how very threatening change creeps up and by the time the majority of the public realize what is happening, it is too late.

On February 28 2025, the Premier stood in the house, the people's house, and stated:
"What Nova Scotians do expect is when you get something wrong, that you have the courage to fix it. We will do that every single time. Because more than perfection, they demand action. They're seeing that action from us."

"The record of this province - and certainly under our government on responding to requests from the public - is very good. It's the best in the country."

This is the opposite of what this government is doing. They are not putting in place amendments that will save lives, improve health care, or address affordability and housing in impactful ways. They are trying to pass laws that create more power for themselves and reduce ability to hold them to account. They are placing this above the actual mandate that was given to them by Nova Scotians: Healthcare, Affordability and Housing.

I call on this government to focus on changes that will actually make a difference to Nova Scotians; save lives and protect the health and safety of all Nova Scotians. I call on this Government to support Bill # 46 tabled on February 26 2025, and previously tabled on September 10 2024 (with the full support of all members except the conservatives). I ask this government to stop abusing their super majority government powers which will only result in their ability to force more consolidation of power and control.

The following additional Bills put forward in this session also insult the rights of Nova Scotians and threaten their right and their need to hold government to account. These bills should not go forward:

Bill No. 6 – An Act Respecting Agriculture, Energy and Natural Resources

This includes lifting the uranium ban and clearing the way for fracking.

Bill No. 11 – Administrative Efficiency and Accountability in Healthcare Act

This Bill repeals the Emergency Department Accountability Act which will eliminate annual reporting regarding emergency departments which is deeply concerning. As it stands, the public has very few options for understanding what steps this government is taking to address deteriorating conditions, practices and policies related to physical and mental health care in Nova Scotia's emergency departments. **Clause 3 of Bill 11 must be removed.**

Bill No. 12 – An Act Respecting Advanced Education and Research

This Bill has garnered significant attention due to its potential implications for the post-secondary education sector. This legislation aims to align university funding with government priorities, sparking concerns about academic autonomy and the future of higher education in Nova Scotia.

Bill 12 proposes significant changes to how universities operate, allowing the Minister of Advanced Education to appoint up to half of the board members and linking funding to government priorities. The Canadian Association of University Teachers has expressed concerns that this approach could lead to a focus on applied research at the expense of arts and humanities, which are crucial for a well-rounded education.

Bill No. 21 – Justice Administration Amendment (2025) Act

This would allow un-proclaimed Legislation e.g. the Coastal Protection Act to be removed.

Sincerely,

Nancy Saunders

(via email)