



February 12, 2019

The Honourable Kevin Murphy  
Speaker  
1st Floor, Province House  
P.O. Box 1617  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
B3J 2Y3

Dear Mr. Speaker,

As the Speaker of the Nova Scotia Legislature, your role is essential to the functioning of the Assembly, as it protects the Assembly, its members and its democratic institutions from the political interference of the executive branch of government. To fulfill their legislative functions, the Assembly, its members and its institutions must remain independent.

As Speaker, you represent the House of Assembly and have jurisdiction over all matters concerning Province House. You are the chair of the House of Assembly Management Commission, the body responsible for regulating services to members.

In light of the recent heavy-handed changes being forced upon the committee structures of the Nova Scotia Legislature, using as one excuse the cost of accessibility, which is within your purview, we in the NDP Caucus call upon you to denounce the rationale of reducing government transparency as the cost of accessibility, and:

- commit to fully televising the Health and Public Accounts Committees (PAC);
- give your full support for the Health committee to continue to meet in the main legislative chamber; and
- urge your colleagues to reinstate the weekly meeting schedule of PAC.

In the fall all parties gave unanimous consent to the establishment of a new standing committee on health care and the merger of the former Resources and Economic Development committees into a single new committee, Natural Resources and Economic Development. There was no discussion,



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implication or information that this change would impact the PAC meetings either in structure or frequency.

Last Wednesday in PAC, with no notice to the other parties, the Liberals forced through a motion that the committee should meet only once per month. To say that we were outraged would be an understatement. PAC has met an average of 20 times per year for the past 30 years.

PAC is a non-partisan committee of the Legislature that examines public spending. To have the number of meetings of this committee curtailed limits the ability of MLAs, the media, and most importantly Nova Scotians to understand and examine the expenditures of the government.

We are now seeing an erosion of our democratic institution—the oldest in Canada. And among the excuses we're being given? The cost of accessibility. And this at a time when your government has committed to an unprecedented effort in this area. You were mentioned specifically in this regard by MLA Gordon Wilson in his explanation of the motion:

*"As the Speaker has mentioned to us, there are consequences of televising, those are financial and we aim to find a balance and be cognizant of that. Again we are the first to have a Health Committee and we have also agreed to televise that, which I think is an excellent thing to do but we need to understand that that creates pressures, and we need to find a balance."*

Mr. Speaker, based on our previous conversations I know that you are committed to increasing the accessibility of committee meetings. These budgetary items, and this "balance" Mr. Wilson speaks of are within your jurisdiction. When you exercised this jurisdiction recently in partnership with the Department of Justice to televise the Law Amendments Committee meetings during the last session, at much greater cost than televising the Health and Public Accounts Committees, which sit in the Chamber where cameras and microphones are already in place, we applauded. When you expressed a commitment to ensure all committees were accessible in this way, we applauded.

We urge you to use your jurisdiction to intervene here. It is within your purview to ensure that accessibility is not used as an excuse to limit transparency. I urge you to speak with your colleagues and petition them to reverse this decision.

Sincerely,



Claudia Chender, NS NDP House Leader



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