

# HALIFAX CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Halifax Chamber of Commerce's President & CEO's Nova Scotia Electoral Boundary  
Commission's Law Amendments Speaking Points

October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Good Evening Law Amendments,

My name is Patrick Sullivan. I am the President and CEO of the Halifax Chamber of Commerce. I would first like to thank you for the chance to speak tonight. The Halifax Chamber of Commerce is a membership-based organization of over 1,700 companies that employ over 65,000 employees in the greater Halifax area.

Our concerns with this legislation are threefold;

- That the Halifax Regional Municipality (Halifax), with currently 47% of Nova Scotia's population, should be effectively represented. Considering its population numbers and growth projections, Halifax is underrepresented and does not have appropriate voter parity.
- That representation for African Nova Scotians and Acadians be entrenched in the current 51 MLA's.
- The number of current Nova Scotian MLA's (51) should not increase, in fact, should decrease to reflect the economic realities of our province today and in the future.

My points will address these issues.

According to the 2018 Fiscal Framework presented to Halifax Council from City staff, Halifax will reach 50% of Nova Scotia's population by 2022. If Halifax was to be effectively represented, based on population, we should currently see 25 – 26 MLA's, but we currently only have 22. This is not voter parity. In fact, following the population estimates, if the commission increases the number of MLA's from 51 to 55 then our representation should be 27 plus MLA's.

It is our belief that we must face the demographic realities of Nova Scotia and the projected future of Nova Scotia for the coming years. By 2022 Halifax will require 5 new MLA's to meet the population target by riding. Halifax is growing. Not only that but when we look at population growth in Nova Scotia to twelve months ending June 30th, 2018, we see that Halifax is the only area that is growing at a significant rate. The province of Nova Scotia had a population increase of 0.55%, provincially driven by an increase of 1.59% for Halifax and of the 18 counties measured in this study, twelve of them have had a decline in population in the last twelve months. If we look at immigration, 3,717 immigrants came to Halifax and 589 went to all other areas of the province. If we look at births versus deaths, Halifax had a net 825 births and all other counties in Nova Scotia had a combined 1,793 deaths versus births for a net decline in organic growth.

Halifax is the economic growth generator of the province, providing 56% of GDP, and 51% of our major projects spending. We are advocates for voter parity and we do not want to see our members across Halifax (and Nova Scotia) feel that they are underrepresented because of their district size and/or voter ratio.

The Halifax Chamber and its members were in full support of providing cultural and linguistic representation for African Nova Scotians and Acadians across our province. We felt that these groups could have been incorporated without additional MLA's either through the redistribution of current representation and/or through general representation. We did not feel it was our place as the Halifax Chamber to provide specific guidance on ridings and which ridings should be placed where, however, given the proposals provided by the commission, we felt we must comment.

We continue to believe that recognition of the cultural significance and contribution of these communities is broader and should be ingrained within the broader culture of government and by all MLAs rather than expecting specific MLAs to represent these groups. We were quite surprised to see such a simplistic solution developed by the commission with the additional seats in underpopulated areas and to return to essentially the protected ridings. Providing seats for Nova Scotians that represent an average of 7,000 electors disenfranchises the voters in average ridings. In addition, if there is real concern about Acadian voices in the legislature then why have almost 12,000 French first language speakers in HRM been neglected?

As suggested, there will now be at least 3 ridings that will be well less than 60% of the average riding. These ridings are deemed exceptional. In other words, 5% of the ridings in Nova Scotia are exceptional. This seems to completely disregard the guidance the Supreme Court has provided in the past in the Carter decision.

Halifax is currently underrepresented in the provincial legislature and the approved additional MLA's will not improve this representation today and will see it continue to get worse in the future. This solution is built for the past not the future of Nova Scotia with an increasingly urban population which includes both African Nova Scotian and Acadian populations. Adding additional ridings in areas that have a significantly lower population of electors harms the electors in other ridings.

To quote the Supreme Court of Canada's 1991 case *Reference re Prov. Electoral Boundaries (Sask.)*: "Effective representation" entails "relative parity of voting power": "A system which dilutes one citizen's vote unduly as compared with another citizen's vote runs the risk of providing inadequate representation to the citizen whose vote is diluted." Where the unequal weighting of votes is not required to ensure better government, "dilution of one citizen's vote as compared with another's should not be countenanced

The cost of additional seats has not been debated publicly. There may be a belief that taxpayer funds are limitless, but adding additional seats have costs today and in the future. Our estimate for four new seats is an additional \$1 Million dollars per year to the Nova Scotia budget for what additional benefit?

The approved changes are not forward-looking, but rather looking to the past for today's answers. We strongly encourage the committee to recognize the amendments do not recognize the realities of the population of Nova Scotia today or in the future. The reason the commission was called was because of successful legal challenges. My fear is that further legal challenges are coming if voters are disenfranchised in this area. "dilution of one citizen's vote as compared with another's should not be countenanced."

I will tell you the chamber asked our members at a luncheon for the Premier in February we tested the question of what the electoral boundary commission should recommend for seats in the legislature. Of 399 respondents, 35% felt the seats should remain the same and 48% believed there should be less MLA's. That is 83% of respondents felt there should be less or the same number of MLA's.

Thank you again and I hope you will take time to reflect on our words.

Patrick Sullivan,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Sullivan', written in a cursive style.

President & CEO, Halifax Chamber of Commerce