

HALIFAX CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Nova Scotia Electoral Boundary Commission's Interim Report: Response Letter

To: The Nova Scotia Electoral Boundary Commission
From: Patrick Sullivan, President & CEO, Halifax Chamber of Commerce
January 14th, 2019

Good Evening Commissioners,

My name is Patrick Sullivan. I am the President and CEO of the Halifax Chamber of Commerce. I would first like to thank the Electoral Boundaries Commission for the chance to speak tonight. The Halifax Chamber of Commerce is a membership-based organization of over 1,650 companies that employ over 65,000 employees in the greater Halifax area.

On September 5th, I presented to you on behalf of our membership and the Chamber. We asked:

- That the Halifax Regional Municipality (Halifax), with currently 47% of Nova Scotia's population, be effectively represented. We now wish to state that Halifax should be represented by 25 to 26 MLAs considering its population numbers and growth projections to provide 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 today will build on our previous points as well as address the specifics in the draft report from the commission.

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 or 56, as is presented in three of the options in their Interim Report, then our representation should be 27 plus MLA's.

It is our belief that the commission 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 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. Halifax is the only area really growing and it is growing for two reasons:

- 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 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 are in full support of providing cultural and linguistic representation for African Nova Scotians and Acadians across our province. We feel that these groups can be 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 feel we must comment.

We believe that recognition of the cultural significance and contribution of these communities is broader and should be ingrained in 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 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?

We still believe that the MLAs in the province should not exceed 51 seats, but if we must increase seats when reviewing the Electoral maps included in the Commissions report, and we fully acknowledge we are in no way experts, it seems that areas in Cape Breton and Southwest Nova could be easily combined while still respecting voter parity. Specifically, the additional ridings considered in the southwest of Clare and Argyle could be combined to provide the requested Acadian riding around Yarmouth and total approximately 13,000 electors. The riding of Richmond and Guysborough could also be combined in some way to reduce the number of additional seats.

The potential riding in Cheticamp with the option of the dual voting process seems to me to be a significant departure from the rest of the report. A riding of 2,556 electors, seems to completely disregard the guidance the Supreme Court has provided in the past in the Carter decision. It does however raise the topic of noncontiguous ridings and why this was not considered for Acadian or African Nova Scotian ridings if there is a process suggested for voting in the Cheticamp riding that could work?

In summary, we are very concerned with the commissions proposed riding additions for many reasons:

- Halifax is currently underrepresented in the provincial legislature and these proposals will not improve this representation today and will see it continue to get worse in the future.
- This proposal 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."

If the commission insists on additional seats, 4 additional seats are not necessary.

The commission raised the potential of a novel voting scheme in Cheticamp, if this is possible, why did the commission not consider noncontiguous voting districts?

Cost of additional seats has not been seemingly considered in the report. There may be a belief that taxpayers 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 suggestions provided by the Commission are not forward-looking, but rather looking to the past for today's answers. We strongly encourage the Commission as an independent group to act as the quasi-judicial group they are and recognize the model they have proposed does not recognize the realities of the population of Nova Scotia today or in the future. The reason this 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 would also like to mention that we will be asking Chamber members for their support for our letter of response to the Commission's Interim Report through our new advocacy email tool, which will be released this week.

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

Sincerely,

Patrick Sullivan

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

President & CEO,
Halifax Chamber of Commerce