

February 27, 2014

Hon. Pierre Poilievre
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Poilievre,

I am writing to you on behalf of Ontario's 160,000 teachers to express a number of concerns regarding Bill C-23, the *Fair Elections Act*. While it may be true that there are aspects of the legislation which require updating, there are several aspects of the Bill which cause us concern.

Before outlining specific concerns, the process being used for this legislation is, in itself, troubling. It is more than ironic that a bill named the *Fair Elections Act*, is being pushed through Parliament in a way which stifles debate. As teachers, we prepare students to fully participate as citizens, including voting in elections when they become eligible. We teach the value of our political system which affords all Canadians that right. To diminish debate on the very legislation essential to protecting democracy conflicts with these values we instill in our students.

There are three specific aspects of the legislation that I wish to highlight on behalf of teachers. First, the removal of the voucher system may disenfranchise voters. Since voting is such an essential right, provisions which may make it impossible for some Canadians to participate in elections is problematic. There are many people who may not possess the type of identification proposed in the Bill; the existing system has served them well and should continue in our view. The objective should be to increase voter participation; actions which may reduce participation should be avoided.

Secondly, we are concerned about the removal of the Commissioner of Canada Elections from the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer. Presently, the Chief Electoral Officer reports to Parliament; under the changes proposed in this Bill, reporting would be done by the Director of Public Prosecutions to the Attorney General (a Cabinet post) rather than Parliament. Given recent inquiries into robocalls and voter suppression, it is even more important that Elections Canada have investigative powers, rather than reduced powers and that reports be made to Parliament rather than Cabinet.

The final concern for teachers is the elimination of the role of outreach from Elections Canada. Elections Canada has a key role to play in encouraging citizens to vote; it should not be restricted to reporting only voting times and places. For many years, teachers in Ontario have assisted in this area by supporting various programs to encourage students to learn about government and become future voters.

We have done this in a non-partisan way and through curriculum and a number of innovative programs, including Student Vote. In fact, Elections Canada and Elections Ontario have been the sponsors or supporters of a number of valuable programs for students. This Bill, as currently written, potentially restricts all outreach and would prevent Elections Canada from playing that key role. Aside from the concern for Canada's youngest voters, this could limit participation by other groups as well. We ask that such restrictions be removed from the proposed legislation and the outreach role of Elections Canada be restored.

In closing, I trust serious consideration will be given to implementing the suggestions and changes presented above. On behalf of the teachers of Ontario, I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Julie Pauletig
President

cc: Right Honourable Stephen Harper, P.C., M.P., Prime Minister of Canada
The Honourable Thomas Mulcair, Leader of the New Democratic Party
Justin Trudeau, Leader of the Liberal Party
Joe Preston, Chair Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (PROC)
OTF Executive

RKY/lg