

December 7, 2017

DUMVILLE  
7-12-17  
GAH

**Standing Committee on Education and Economic Development  
First Report of the Third Session, Sixty-fifth General Assembly  
Committee Activities**

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly:

The Standing Committee on Education and Economic Development is charged with matters concerning advanced and early learning, tourism and other industries, heritage and culture, immigration, multiculturalism, and rural development. In addition, it may, by majority decision of its membership, meet to examine and inquire into such matters and things as the committee deems appropriate.

**Committee Membership**

Permanent members of your committee are:

S. Forrest (Bush) Dumville, Chair (District 15, West Royalty-Springvale)  
Peter Bevan-Baker (District, 17, Kellys Cross-Cumberland)  
Kathleen Casey (District 14, Charlottetown-Lewis Point)  
Hon. Robert Mitchell (District 10, Charlottetown-Sherwood) (*as of March 10, 2017*)  
Matthew MacKay (District 20, Kensington-Malpeque)  
Steven Myers (District 2, Georgetown-St. Peters)  
Chris Palmer (District 21, Summerside-Wilmot)  
Hal Perry (District 27, Tignish-Palmer Road) (*as of November 3, 2017*)

Former permanent members of your committee include Hon. Sonny Gallant (District 24, Evangeline-Miscouche) (*until March 10, 2017*), and Hon. Jordan Brown (District 13, Charlottetown-Brighton) (*until November 3, 2017*).

Richard Brown (District 12, Charlottetown-Victoria Park) served as a substitute member at the March 15, March 29, and October 4, 2017 committee meetings. Bradley G. Trivers (District 18, Rustico-Emerald) served as a substitute member at the March 15, 2017 committee meeting.

**Changes in Membership**

Your committee has four changes in permanent membership to report. By letter from the Hon. Premier, Hon. Sonny Gallant (District 24, Evangeline-Miscouche) ceased to be a member of the committee effective March 10, 2017. On the same day, Hon. Robert Mitchell (District 10, Charlottetown-Sherwood) was appointed to your committee. By letter from the Hon. Premier, Hon. Jordan Brown (District 13, Charlottetown-Brighton) ceased to be a member of the committee effective November 3, 2017. On the same day, Hal Perry (District 27, Tignish-Palmer Road) was appointed to your committee.

### **Committee Activities**

Since last reporting to the House (December 13, 2016), your committee met on ten occasions: February 1, February 8, February 15, March 15, March 29, May 11, September 13, October 4, and October 18 (twice).

On **February 1, 2017** your committee met to receive a briefing on the 2008 Bell Aliant – Government of PEI high-speed internet services agreement from Hon. Heath MacDonald, Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, and Kal Whitnell, Senior Director of Economic Research and Trade Negotiations in the Department of Economic Development and Tourism. During discussion, the committee made a number of requests for additional information, which the witnesses agreed to provide if able to do so. At this meeting your committee also made additional decisions related to its mandate. First, the committee agreed that it wished to have representatives of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism make a presentation on signage legislation to the committee. Second, the committee agreed to seek a written explanation of the re-zoning recommendations of the school review process from Bob Andrews, School Reorganization Project Manager, with the option to make an in-person presentation if Mr. Andrews felt it would be more appropriate. Mr. Andrews responded to this request with correspondence dated February 16, 2017. Third, the committee agreed that it wished to receive presentations on community hub schools and school-centred community enterprise as proposed in correspondence from Paul Bennett of Schoolhouse Consulting. Finally, the committee agreed that it wished to have a briefing on the recent Mill River Resort transaction from Hon. Heath MacDonald, Minister of Economic Development and Tourism.

On **February 8, 2017**, your committee met to receive a briefing on public signage legislation from Chris Jones, Director of Strategic Initiatives in the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, and Cheryl Paynter, CEO of Tourism PEI. Following the briefing, your committee made additional decisions related to its mandate. First, your committee agreed that it would consider having the Belfast Community Action Committee appear, as per their request, as well as consider inviting other such groups from the areas of potential school closure, after recommendations arising from the school review process had been made by the Public Schools Branch (in a subsequent meeting the committee decided not to seek these appearances). The committee also agreed to seek clarification from the Public Schools Branch on the timeframe for recommendations expected to come after the 60-day public consultation process, to which Parker Grimmer, Director of the Public Schools Branch, replied in correspondence dated February 27, 2017. Finally, the committee agreed that after the Public Schools Branch makes its final recommendations in the school review process, the committee shall invite the French Language School Board to appear in order to discuss how they manage small schools, whether they face challenges similar to those faced by small English language schools, and the mechanisms they employ to keep small schools and small class sizes operational.

At the **February 15, 2017** meeting the committee received briefings on community hub schools from Paul Bennett of Schoolhouse Consulting and Leif Helmer of the Nova Scotia Small Schools Initiative; and on school-centred community enterprise by David Upton and Lauren Sears of Common Good Solutions.

On **March 15, 2017**, your committee met to receive briefings on high-speed internet services from internet service providers (ISPs) Wicked EH?, represented by Joelene Ferguson, Justin Ferguson and Alesia Napier; Air Tech Communications, represented by Kent England, Ryan England and Alex Maine; PEI Monitoring, represented by Wayne Phelan; and Eastlink, represented by David Dunphy and Natalie MacDonald. Following the briefings, the committee made several decisions related to its mandate. Firstly, the committee agreed that it wished to hear from additional internet service providers who were unable to attend on March 15, though the committee did not agree to a request from an internet service provider that it be permitted to provide testimony *in camera*. Secondly, the committee agreed to a request from MLA Sidney MacEwen that it seek a briefing from the Department of Education and/or the Public Schools Branch on wait times for children's psychological assessments, to be scheduled when the committee's work plan allows. Finally, the committee agreed to send a letter to Bell Aliant to seek clarification on whether there is a list of Island homes or addresses that cannot be provided with internet access under Bell Aliant's model of service delivery. A Bell Aliant representative responded to this inquiry in correspondence dated April 19, 2017.

On **March 29, 2017**, your committee met to receive a briefing on the 2008 Bell Aliant – Government of PEI high-speed internet services agreement from Hon. Allen Roach, Minister of Finance, and Kal Whitnell, Senior Director of Economic Research and Trade Negotiations in the Department of Economic Development and Tourism. Your committee also received further briefings on high speed internet services from Xplornet Communications represented by Charles Beaudet, Corey Hallett and Troy Bertram; and additional input from representatives of Air Tech Communications, PEI Monitoring and Wicked EH? Following the briefings, the committee decided to send correspondence to Hon. Heath MacDonald, Minister of Economic Development and Tourism, to pass on concerns of the witnesses regarding the recently announced internet speed test survey, and to request information on the origin of the speed test.

During the meetings of March 15 and March 29, feedback was provided by internet service provider representatives on the role of Government in ensuring high quality internet access for Islanders. This included suggestions such as facilitating communication between communities and ISPs to help communities meet their needs, without favouring one ISP over another or interfering in free enterprise; bringing ISPs active in PEI together to discuss community needs and ISP capacities; and maintaining regular communication with all ISPs.

On **May 11, 2017** your committee met to discuss its draft report to the Legislative Assembly.

On **September 13, 2017** your committee met to discuss its work plan. At this meeting the committee made the procedural decision to sit in alphabetical order, regardless of party affiliation, commencing with the next meeting. In regard to the federal government's proposed tax changes for small businesses and professional corporations, the committee made several decisions:

- That the committee would send a letter to the federal government to request that the consultation deadline on the proposed tax changes be changed from October 2 to the end of the calendar year.
- That the committee would seek a briefing from federal tax specialists to explain the proposed tax changes.
- That the committee would seek a briefing from local private sector tax specialists on the effects of the proposed tax changes.
- That the committee would request the PEI Members of Parliament and Senators conduct a consultation with Islanders on the proposed tax changes, and that a response to this request be provided by September 30. (Responses were received from the following: Senator Percy Downe, September 18, 2017; Hon. Wayne Easter, September 25 and October 3, 2017; Senator Diane Griffin, September 27, 2017; MP Sean Casey, October 4, 2017; and MP Robert Morrissey, October 8, 2017)
- That the committee shall consider whether to invite briefings by groups proposed by MLA Darlene Compton via a September 5 letter following the federal and local tax specialist briefings and responses by PEI MPs and Senators regarding local consultations.
- That the committee would request that the Premier and the Minister of Finance write to the federal government in support of the committee's request that the consultation deadline be extended to the end of the calendar year. (The Premier copied the committee on a September 25 letter to Hon. Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance.)

At this meeting the committee also agreed to a request from the UPEI Student Union to appear before the committee to discuss policy priorities for the 2017-2018 school year, and added the following subjects to its work plan for future meetings:

- A briefing from La Commission scolaire de langue française on the challenges and successes in management and operation of small schools;
- A briefing from the new regional economic advisory councils on their scope of work and their views on community economic development in PEI (to occur at some time in the indeterminate future so as to allow the councils time to be fully established and working);
- A briefing from the Department of Education on protocols surrounding head lice in public schools and possible solutions to what appears to be a growing problem;
- A briefing on the Provincial Autism Strategy in terms of its current status and an update on work done since the strategy was last discussed before a committee;

- A briefing or written communication providing an update on the PEI Cultural Strategy, addressing specifically whether the strategy is still on target to be released in fall, 2017;
- A briefing from the Department of Workforce and Advanced Learning and/or Skills PEI on efforts to repatriate Islanders to fill job vacancies and attract new businesses;
- A briefing on the Provincial Nominee Program, to provide an update on the current program and addressing matters such as attraction and retention of newcomers, especially in rural areas; and
- A briefing on the learning partners advisory and district advisory councils in Education to provide an update on the work of the councils, successes and challenges they have experienced and changes they would like to see made.

The committee also agreed to write to the Standing Committee on Communities, Land and Environment to suggest that that committee seek a briefing providing an overview on the system governing the application and waiting period for, and issuance of, building permits.

On **October 4, 2017**, your committee met to receive a briefing on the effects of proposed federal tax changes for private corporations from Terry Soloman of MRSB Group. At this meeting the committee also decided to send correspondence to the MPs who had not responded to the committee's previous letter regarding consultations on proposed federal tax changes, and express disappointment in the lack of response to the committee's letter, and ask for an update on where they stand on this issue.

On **October 18, 2017**, your committee met in the morning to receive briefings from Montague Consolidated School students Alex Beck, Connor Cheverie, Meadow Papp, and Isaiah Williams on their class project which proposes that the red fox be designated PEI's Provincial Animal; and from UPEI Student Union representatives Taya Nabuurs and Colin Trewin on Student Union policy priorities for the 2017-2018 school year. Following these presentations, the committee agreed to send a letter to the department responsible for the *Provincial Emblems and Honours Act* requesting that said department explore the possibility of designating the red fox as Provincial Animal under the Act. The committee also decided to send letters to the appropriate Government departments to recommend the enacting of legislation to provide external oversight of sexual violence policies at PEI's post-secondary institutions; and to request consideration of the possibility of a per-student funding model dedicated to supporting the enhancement of mental health and wellness supports and initiatives for post-secondary students on Prince Edward Island. Lastly, following discussion with Student Union representatives on the Training PEI – Career Connect program, the committee agreed to send a letter to PEI's four MPs to ask whether they still support changes to the EI zones that they supported prior to the last election, to help alleviate the issue of unequal access to EI support. To date, MPs Sean Casey and Hon. Wayne Easter have replied to the committee's inquiry.

Your committee met again in the afternoon of **October 18, 2017**, to receive a briefing on wait times for children's psychological assessments by Public Schools Branch psychologists; protocols for head lice in public schools; the Provincial Autism Strategy; and the Learning Partners Advisory and District Advisory Councils, from Hon. Doug Currie, Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture; Julia Gaudet, Director of Student Services in the Public Schools Branch; and Carolyn Simpson, Director of Early Childhood Development in the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture. Due to the length of the brief and discussion with the committee, some of the planned briefing topics were set aside for a future meeting. The committee agreed to place this briefing, as well as a briefing requested from the Department of Workforce and Advanced Learning on efforts toward the repatriation of Islanders, at the top of its work plan priorities.

### **Recommendations**

- 1. Your committee recommends that the Department of Education, Early Learning and Culture and the Public Schools Branch review the School Change Policy, including by consulting case studies and similar policies in other jurisdictions.**
  
- 2. Your committee recommends that Government work with internet service providers (ISPs) in a spirit of fairness, collaboration, communication and facilitation, with the goal of enabling the best possible access for Islanders. This includes:**
  - **educating Islanders on methods of internet access and factors affecting performance;**
  - **providing timely access for ISPs to public infrastructure where appropriate; and**
  - **in cases where no ISP can independently make a business case for improving service where there is an identified community need, implementing an open and transparent request for proposals process.**
  
- 3. Your committee recommends that the *Provincial Emblems and Honours Act* be amended in order to designate the Red Fox as PEI's Provincial Animal, and that the designation take place this year as a way of celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Canada.**

Montague Consolidated School students showed great initiative in bringing their project, entitled "Why the Red Fox Should be P.E.I.'s Provincial Animal", to your committee's attention. The committee was impressed by the students' creativity and dedication in completing a project that includes a well-researched persuasive essay, red fox artwork, and other efforts. Indeed the students have been working on this project over more than one school year, under the guidance of teacher Edwena Arbuckle. It was very encouraging to see elementary-age students taking an active interest in the legislative process by bringing their request to the attention of a committee of the legislature. Your committee supports their idea and brings it forward for the legislature's consideration.

- 4. Your committee recommends that legislation be enacted to ensure external oversight of sexual violence policies at PEI's post-secondary institutions.**

Increasing oversight and accountability in addressing sexual violence on campus is one of the UPEI Student Union's policy priorities for the current academic year. Post-secondary students are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence as, according to Statistics Canada, women aged 15 to 24 are the victim of 47% of all sexual assaults. A survey carried out by the Student Union among the student body received significant feedback regarding concerns about sexual violence and support for victims, and the need for the university and government to address both. Yet, reporting of sexual violence incidents on Canadian campuses is surprisingly low, which raises concerns about the adequacy of policies that encourage reporting of such violence and provide support to victims. Other provinces have enacted legislation to ensure external oversight of sexual violence policies at post-secondary institutions. Your committee agrees with the Student Union that PEI should follow suit.

**5. Your committee recommends that government consider the possibility of a per-student funding approach for the delivery of mental health services at PEI's post-secondary institutions.**

Another concern of the UPEI Student Union, and the student body in general, is access to on-campus services and supports for mental health and well-being. Post-secondary students are a key demographic in that most mental health disorders tend to surface in the 18 to 24 age bracket. This can be exacerbated by the many difficulties students face during their post-secondary careers, such as living away from support networks and the stresses associated with the financial demands of post-secondary education. The Student Union notes that provision of suitable mental health services is not only a social obligation, but can also provide benefits such as greater academic persistence and student retention, and therefore they seek funding for mental health services and initiatives on a per-student basis that would be tied to enrolment. Your committee suggests that the feasibility of such a model would be worth exploring.

**6. Your committee recommends that Government work with PEI's post-secondary institutions and First Nations to encourage greater enrolment of indigenous students and promote inclusion of indigenous culture, history and knowledge in post-secondary education, as per the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.**

**7. Your committee recommends that Government continue to attempt to reduce wait-times for children's psychological assessments by employing the services of private psychologists until a full complement of school psychologists in the Public Schools Branch can be reached.**

Following the October 18 committee briefing on wait-times for children's psychological assessments, the Minister of Education, Early Learning and Culture indicated that unused funds intended for unfilled school psychologists positions within the Public Schools Branch would be used to pay for assessments by private psychologists. Your committee hopes that this will be effective in wait-time reduction, and encourages the Department and the Public Schools Branch to make a priority of timely access to psychological assessment for children identified as in need, whether the assessment is delivered by a psychologist within the Public Schools Branch or in private practice.

**Conclusion**

Your committee thanks the various individuals, organizations and businesses that took the time to share their concerns and ideas. Your committee looks forward to continuing its work and providing further updates to the House in the future.

Respectfully submitted,



S. Forrest (Bush) Dumville, MLA  
Chair, Standing Committee on Education and Economic Development