

**Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin
MLA Cumberland North**



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Députée Cumberland North**

Nova Scotia Legislature

January 24, 2022

Hon. Brian Wong
Department of Advanced Education
1505 Barrington Street
11th Floor, Maritime Centre
Halifax, NS
B3J 3K5

Dear Minister Wong:

Greetings from Cumberland County. I hope you had a safe and enjoyable Holiday Season.

Thank you for your dedication to the people of Nova Scotia, especially your leadership for the Department of Advanced Education.

As Member of the Legislative Assembly for Cumberland North, I am always looking for ways to improve the lives of the people I represent. I am requesting a meeting with you to discuss the needs and priorities identified below. As we get closer to the spring, it is time for budget consultations, and overdue answers to questions about the delayed release of the capital plan. I want to make sure the priorities and concerns of Cumberland North are documented for consideration.

Aside from my specific asks of your department, I'd request that you look at your responsibilities as minister through a lens with greater emphasis on Atlantic cooperation. We are a small region full of great minds of all ages, and as Minister of Advanced Education, a strategic approach with more regional planning will benefit all of us and make our province more competitive going forward.

I am looking for your assistance to advance priorities related to your department including:

- Amending the MOU between our universities and NSCC regarding a Licenced Practical Nurse's education to become a Registered Nurse. As it currently stands, only LPNs that attended an NSCC campus qualify for the two-year bridging program to become a RN. All LPNs here in Nova Scotia have passed a National licensing exam and many have several years of experience. They do not want to have to start at square one to obtain the education to become a RN. The current demand for RNs also serves to demonstrate the urgent need for these changes.
 - I brought this issue to your attention during Question Period on October 21, 2021. At that time, you'd indicated that this would be a priority for your government. I hope that priority will be realized in the early months of 2022.

- Northern Nova Scotia is the only health zone that does not have an RN program. This is contributing to a shortage of RNs, which is having a detrimental impact on health care services. I would like your department to examine the possibilities of creating a satellite RN program (like Yarmouth) from either Dal, St. FX or CBU in Cumberland County and report back. Further to that, another possibility exists through a satellite RN program in Moncton through UNB that could be expanded to meet our needs.
- Sexual violence is a major problem on university campuses. The culture of sexual violence must change. Although there is no university campus in Cumberland North, I have young women that have been victims of sexual violence on NS university campuses that have pushed the problem under the rug. Please make this a priority.
- NSCC is an incredible institution of learning. Currently, the Amherst campus is costing our provincial government over one million dollars a year in rent and is located in an area that is not reaching the potential spin-off benefits that NSCC could have in our town. Over the years, local representatives and experts in the field have communicated a belief that if the province used those funds to build a province-owned campus in the downtown area of Amherst, the economic spinoffs would be very beneficial to all. We are requesting that an analysis be done with the goal of construction of a new campus.
- NSCC provides learning opportunities for people across all the Maritime regions. Student housing is urgently needed, and we request that Downtown Amherst be considered for the next construction of student housing.
- Trades are urgently needed for the construction of housing. There are untapped opportunities for trades to be more "hands-on". This would benefit the demand for workers while providing more practical learning for students studying various trades- particularly carpentry, plumbing and electrical. I have several tradespeople that are willing to take on students here in Cumberland North as soon as possible.
- Family Medicine residency has been set up in rural parts of Nova Scotia including Northern Zone. The purpose is to increase the number of family physicians choosing to practice medicine in rural NS. Unfortunately, many of the family medicine residents that are doing the 2-year residency in Northern Zone are living in HRM and commuting. This will not produce the results intended unless the medical residents are living in rural Nova Scotia. Please consider changing the requirements of this to include living and practicing in rural NS. The truth is, this program was very well intended when it was designed. It is not living up to its original purpose though. Many residents have opted to commute from the metropolitan areas, and thus limit the likelihood of remaining in the rural community upon finishing their residency. Further to that, other rural areas were not selected by students at all.
- Residency seats for medical doctors should be made available as a priority to any Nova Scotian resident that have studied medicine outside of Canada. These Nova Scotians want to come home to practice medicine and would be more likely to stay in live in NS and the Maritime Region if they completed their residency program at home. I would like to discuss with you ways of augmenting current programs to strengthen a unique family medicine residency program for Nova Scotia doctors who have completed their medical degree outside of Canada and want to come home for residency and stay to practice medicine.

Advanced Education will play an integral part in advancing Nova Scotia and our Maritime Region to become competitive both internationally and in achieving economic independence in our own country by becoming less reliant on federal transfers. Cooperation amongst our educational institutions will strengthen our ability to adapt post pandemic.

Thank you for your leadership as Minister and I look forward to working with you in these important areas.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin

Cc: Dr. Stephen Ellis, MP Cumberland Colchester; Hon. Michele Thompson, Minister of Health and Wellness; Mayor Murray Scott, Cumberland County; Mayor David Kogon, Town of Amherst