

I'm Sam Hammond, president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. With me today are Gene Lewis, our general secretary, and Vivian McCaffrey, executive staff.

I am here today to appeal to the members of this committee -- to all members of the Legislature -- to vote against Bill 115.

This is not a bill that can be fixed through amendments.

The bill's underlying principles attack the fundamental rights of free collective bargaining – rights that are protected through the freedom of association provisions of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

This view is supported by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, whose spokespersons described Bill 115 as “an unprecedented attack on the civil liberties and constitutional rights and freedoms of educational workers.”

Collective bargaining rights are central to ensuring that workers are treated with dignity, respect, and fairness in the workplace.

Through previous bargaining, ETFO has negotiated terms and conditions ranging from compensation, to maximum class size, fair transfer, staffing, and hiring policies, and provision for improved health and safety protections.

Our members' working conditions are what determine our students' learning conditions.

Bill 115 pre-empts the collective bargaining process for teachers and education support workers employed by public school boards across the province.

The bill takes the unprecedented step of imposing contract provisions agreed to between the government and OECTA on our members and other unions who refused to agree to the government's terms.

The bill was introduced with the threat of imposing contract provisions before our current agreements had expired and before the teacher-school board bargaining process had the opportunity to take its natural course.

Contrary to the government's fearmongering, there was never any suggestion or possibility, given the legal parameters of teacher bargaining, that ETFO members would not be in their classrooms on the first day of school or that strike action would take place in the days or weeks following.

ETFO has scheduled strike votes in our locals, but, as the government is fully aware, these votes are a normal part of the bargaining process. Strikes are a last resort when dealing with tough negotiations and are an extremely rare occurrence in the education sector.

Let me address a couple of other myths spun by the government.

It is a myth that ETFO did not want to negotiate with the government a provincial framework agreement for local bargaining. The Minister of Education has made great use of the phrase that “ETFO walked away from the discussion table after an hour.”

We had valid reasons for our abrupt departure.

Collective bargaining is based on establishing mutually-agreed upon ground rules that respect both partners to the discussion. It is understood that both parties have the opportunity to table issues for discussion that represent their respective priorities.

There was no preliminary discussion of ground rules.

I spent many years as a negotiator for our Hamilton-Wentworth local. I can tell you from personal experience that the government's process for the education sector discussions broke all of the time-honored conventions of collective bargaining.

It is also a myth that the government is simply asking teachers to take a "two-year pause" in their salaries. Our members are deeply offended by this characterization of the government's demands.

Our members fully understand that the government's demands go far beyond a two-year salary freeze. Most teachers will, in fact, experience a salary cut over the next two years and younger teachers will lose half of their entitled increase based on their experience and additional qualifications which they earn through personal expense on completing university degrees, courses, and other professional development.

There was no warning for the extent of the government's proposed strips to our salary grids, sick days, or retirement benefits.

Our members fail to understand how their sick leave is an easy government target given MPPs' salary, retirement savings plan, and generous severance payments.

The government has pitched its attack on education sector collective agreements as the only alternative to cancelling full-day kindergarten.

This is a false dichotomy. The government began its implementation of full-day kindergarten – a program we fully support – two years after the 2008 recession. The government was well aware of the costs of the program at that point and of the growing economic challenges.

At no time, either before or during the 2011 election, did the Liberals state that Ontario could only afford the program if it took \$1.2 billion or more out of education sector compensation.

Ontario, like most of the world is facing economic challenges. Public sector workers are willing to their part, but not to pay the full cost of balancing the deficit.

We believe Bill 115 is symptomatic of an extreme right-wing agenda whose goal is to use the current economic situation as a pretext to go after the hard-fought gains of unionized employees.

We fear that Ontario is quickly becoming like the Republican-dominated states south of the border where union rights and wages are under attack and the middle class is withering away along with its ability to be the engine of economic recovery.

Our fight against Bill 115 is about more than just the plight of education workers. Education sector workers understand that if we don't stand up to this draconian anti-labour legislation, the government will simply become emboldened and move on to the next union target.



We urge MPPs in Ontario to step back from this path and to return to a more balanced approach to dealing with the deficit and the public sector workforce, an approach that treats unions as partners, not an easy scapegoat for an economic crisis they didn't create.

Vote against Bill 115.

Thank you.