

For Immediate Release

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‘Why don’t our voices matter?’: CUPE Nova Scotia renews call for all unions to be involved in addressing violence in schools

Halifax-Kjipuktuk – The report released today by Auditor General Kim Adair describes a workplace violence crisis in public schools across Nova Scotia. Titled “Preventing and Addressing Violence in Nova Scotia Public Schools”, the report echoes research completed by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Nova Scotia that was ignored by the office of Education & Early Childhood Development Minister Becky Druhan. CUPE Nova Scotia calls for immediate action from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Education, including urgent consultation with all unions that have members working in schools.

Despite representing over 5,000 school support staff across the province, and having completed substantial research on this exact topic, CUPE Nova Scotia has been shut out of conversations about violence in schools. Even where other unions were consulted, CUPE’s requests to participate have received no response from Minister Druhan.

“The Auditor General’s report makes the same stark conclusions we have been trying to raise with the Department for years. Why should workers, parents, or students have confidence that anything will change now? Ignoring CUPE’s attempts to share the extensive data we have collected on this topic and bring our members’ voice to discussions on this issue, indicates that this violence in schools, and 5,000 school support staff across Nova Scotia, are not the government’s priority,” said CUPE Nova Scotia President Nan McFadgen.

A statement from the Minister’s office says they are working with the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU) and Public School Administrators Association of Nova Scotia (PSAANS), but the Department has recently prevented any testimony about the report’s findings from outside the Minister’s office.

“The Department cannot continue to silence workers. Along with PSAANS and NSTU and the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU), CUPE Nova Scotia members are facing workplace violence every day,” said McFadgen.

Over 600 incidents were reported at the Halifax Regional Centre for Education from September 2023 to March 2024, alone. Almost 70% of these reports were from CUPE school support staff.

“The Minister specifically excluding school support staff sends a really strong message to our members that the Minister does not value the safety, wellbeing, and human rights of thousands working in public schools in this province,” said Nelson Scott, Chair of the Nova Scotia School Board Council of Unions (NSSBCU), and President of CUPE 5050.

In response to a 2022 survey, 43% of CUPE school support staff said they do not feel their employer does enough to prevent workplace violence. A startling 50% said they did not even receive a response to workplace violence reports. These numbers come directly from reports CUPE has tried to share with the Department.

With the release of the Auditor General's report, there is no denying the extent of this crisis, and the complete failure by the Department, RCEs and CSAP to monitor, prevent or address violent incidents in schools. CUPE Nova Scotia renews our call for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to work with all worker organizations representing members in this sector, as they move forward on this issue.

"'Schools work because we do' is not only a bargaining slogan. It's a simple fact. Our members are essential to the safe and successful functioning of public schools, and it's time the Minister recognized that," said Scott. "School support staff experience violence at work every day, why don't our voices matter to Minister Druhan?"

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