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of Nova Scotia
Municipalities

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December 18, 2014

The Honourable Joanne Bernard
Minister, Community Services

Minister Bernard:

Re: Minister's Advisory Panel on Accessibility Legislation

I am writing you on behalf of the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities (UNSM).

I am pleased municipalities have been given the opportunity to comment on the document prepared by the Panel. The timing is extremely short for municipal councils to discuss the report and provide written comments, as many councils only meet monthly. Our Board offers the following comments on behalf of municipalities.

Municipalities understand accessibility matters, and strive to provide accessible facilities and services. They understand there is more to be done, and would be willing to work with the Province to achieve a better level of accessibility. The resources and knowledge to better understand the needs of residents varies amongst municipalities, as does their financial ability to respond. Municipalities strive to balance the many needs in their community with the financial resources available to them.

Adopting a human rights approach to accessibility is understandable. However, municipalities are concerned with the implications of this legislation.

Municipalities are struggling to meet the requirements of current and proposed provincial legislation which will have serious impacts on municipal budgets. We are aware of proposed provincial legislation in the areas of solid waste, water and wastewater, biodiversity, natural resource development, occupational health and safety, activities designations (watercourse alterations and on-site septic systems), climate change, energy, electricity and vegetation management.

We trust the government is aware of the cumulative impact of these changes, and that priorities will be set to match the resources to comply with the legislation. There needs to be financial support from other levels of government made available to municipalities to meet new regulations. Municipal services support provincial goals, but municipalities lack the revenue sources to deliver these expected goals.

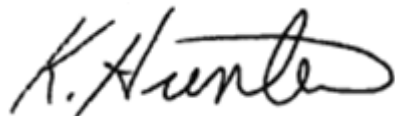
Building new facilities or new infrastructure to include accessibility is achievable, as is the opportunity when municipal facilities are undergoing major renovation. The concern is more around renovating existing facilities and infrastructure.

There are some facilities and infrastructure that cannot be made accessible unless they are torn down and rebuilt—that is difficult. Others will require funding beyond what the municipality and its tax payers can reasonably afford. These possibilities must be recognized in any legislation proposed.

More time and research is needed, including consultation with individual municipalities, to determine how municipalities can implement accessibility standards effectively. The range of built infrastructure and services differs substantially among municipalities as does their capacity (human and financial) to respond. There should be a process to help set priorities within specific municipalities. There should also be consideration for provision of accessible facilities, from a regional perspective as opposed to requiring every facility to be accessible. An example would include playgrounds and trails. Making sure there is an accessible playground or trail in an area would be more easily achieved than requiring every playground or trail to be accessible.

Municipalities welcome the opportunity to be involved in the development of the legislation, regulations and standards, which the Panel Report supports. UNSM would be pleased to work with the Province to engage municipalities in this process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Hunter', written in a cursive style.

Warden Keith Hunter
UNSM President

cc: UNSM Board of Directors
The Honourable Mark Furey, Minister, Municipal Affairs