

To: Honourable Adriana LaGrange  
Minister of Education

Members of Executive Council  
Executive Branch  
228 Legislature Building  
10800-97 Avenue  
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

March 22, 2022

From: Lorna McIlroy  
President, Alberta Retired Teachers' Association (ARTA)

**Re: Bill 85: Education (Students First) Statutes Amendment Act.**

Dear Minister LaGrange,

In November of last year, you introduced Bill 85, also known as the Students First Act, as a method to improve, "Safety for Students, Confidence for Parents, and Accountability for Teachers." While I admire the concern you show for student safety, I cannot help but question your methods and the overall effectiveness of the plan. As a retired teacher, I am very concerned about the impact this bill will have on public confidence in the teaching profession and in public education in general. On behalf of the Alberta Retired Teachers' Association, I am asking you to reconsider your approach, as well as your ministry's priorities.

Bill 85 seeks to "elevate the status of the teaching profession across Alberta by improving transparency and increasing accountability." On its surface, this sounds like a noble effort being made in service to teachers. However, as those who have dedicated their lives to teaching know, transparency and accountability in public education already exists. Teachers who are accused of misconduct are investigated promptly, and if found guilty, they are held accountable for their actions and removed from the classroom. The disciplinary hearings of the Alberta Teachers' Association are a matter of public record, are sent to your ministry, and can be freely accessed by any concerned citizen.

This proposed bill also seeks to create a new form of transparency, in the form of an online registry where parents would be able to view the teaching certificates of any educator, as well as any certificate suspensions or cancellations attached to their names. It is exceedingly rare for teachers found guilty of misconduct to be allowed to teach again. In fact, it has only happened once in the last century, after they were suspended for an unpaid fine.



So, I ask you, in a public education system that has no history of allowing dangerous teachers to return to the classroom, what purpose would such a registry hold? Any teachers with such marks on their records are, by definition, former teachers. Students have no chance of ending up in their classrooms, and parents can be confident that their children are not being placed in an unsafe environment.

While the positive impacts of Bill 85 are hard to see, the negatives are more apparent. The existence of this proposed registry suggests to parents that there are known, dangerous teachers interacting with their children. It suggests that the Alberta Teachers' Association, school boards, and your ministry have all decided to look the other way when it comes to student safety. It suggests that parents must be vigilant, and "shop around" for a safe teacher. This registry only serves to generate a distrust of public education and create unwarranted worries.

Between Bill 85 and the suggested removal of disciplinary responsibilities from the Alberta Teachers' Association, your ministry is portraying itself as being "tough on crime" in a field that has been successfully self-regulating for a century. Imagine how much better off students would be if your attentions were instead put towards finding ways to increase funding for schools, to guaranteeing aids for students with diverse needs, and to building a curriculum that every educator could be proud to teach.

As retired teachers, we are in full support of safety for students, confidence for parents, and accountability for teachers. We celebrate those ideals. Bill 85, however, does nothing to further these goals. It seeks to solve problems we do not have, at the expense of more pressing issues in our education system. If you truly want to put "Students First," I suggest that you work with the Alberta Teachers' Association to that end, rather than continuing your current divisive actions.



Lorna McIlroy  
President, ARTA

cc:

Jason Schilling, President ATA  
Dennis Theobald, Executive Secretary, ATA  
Daniel Mulloy, CEO, ARTA  
Honourable Jason Kenney, Alberta Premier  
Ms. Rachel Notley, MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona  
Ms. Sarah Hoffman, MLA for Edmonton-Glenora

