

premier@novascotia.ca

April 11, 2025

Honourable Tim Houston
Office of the Premier

Dear Premier,

Re: Beverage Alcohol in Corner Stores

I am writing to you today on behalf of the hundreds of dedicated Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU) members who work diligently at the Nova Scotia Liquor Corporation (NSLC) across our province. A CBC Nova Scotia article earlier this week raises concerns regarding a potential announcement this month on the sale of beer in corner stores.

NSGEU members, and indeed many Nova Scotians, are left questioning the rationale and timing behind this potential policy change. Beer is currently readily accessible to Nova Scotians through the established network of NSLC stores, NSLC Agency stores, breweries, vineyards, distilleries, and private stores. In fact, data shows that over 90% of Nova Scotians live within five kilometres access to NSLC products. This begs the question: who is clamouring for increased access to beer right now to the point where it may warrant such immediate attention from your government? Why is this matter so pressing? At a time when our province continues to grapple with a significant healthcare crisis, and many Nova Scotians are in dire need of family doctors and timely access to crucial diagnostic services, it is, deeply perplexing to our members and many citizens why the issue of selling beer in corner stores appears to have jumped the queue, seemingly taking precedence over the urgent needs within our healthcare system. Increasing access of beverage alcohol will undoubtedly result in higher usage, putting further strain on our healthcare system.

The NSLC has worked hard to implement systems to ensure that beverage alcohol and cannabis products cannot be purchased by minors or those under the influence. Those checks, balances, and staff training do not exist in corner stores where responsible retailing of a controlled substance is secondary to profits.

Furthermore, the timing of this potential announcement is perplexing given the current economic climate. Nova Scotia, like the rest of the country, is steering its way through a challenging trade war with the United States, coupled with growing threats of an economic downturn and potential recession. Is it truly the right time to prioritize making beer even more accessible? From Sydney to Yarmouth there is a sense of anxiety regarding our future. Industries vital to our province, such as fishing, forestry, and mining (industries you are trying to grow), are facing significant risks. This move is a slippery slope towards privatization which would also put the livelihoods of those roughly 2000 NSLC employees at risk. In many small communities across Nova Scotia, these jobs can be among the highest paid. Expansion into corner stores poses a direct and immediate threat to the NSLC employees working in these communities and their families. In

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this environment of widespread concern, it is difficult to understand why the focus would shift towards expanding beer sales and possibly killing jobs that already exist.

Last fiscal year, the NSLC reported \$874.5 million in sales, with approximately \$283.8 million being returned to the province. This money is used to pay for valuable public services that Nova Scotians rely on. Removing any portion of this revenue from the Provincial coffers to line the pockets of large retailers is irresponsible and economically dangerous to this province. As you know, the vast majority of convenience stores in Nova Scotia are subsidiaries of much larger companies. This does not help local business, it does the opposite.

The NSGEU urges your government to seriously reconsider the potential implications of this decision, both for our dedicated NSLC employees and for the broader economic and social well-being of Nova Scotia. We believe that the current system effectively and responsibly manages the sale of beverage alcohol, while also providing important revenue for the province.

Premier, earlier this year you spoke about problem solvers and problem stretchers. There is one more label that you did not mention: there are sometimes solutions that are plucked from nowhere that are simply in search of a problem.

I am seeking a meeting to discuss these serious concerns further and to understand the rationale driving this potential policy shift. If there truly is a problem, we are ready and willing to help find a solution.

Sincerely,



Sandra Mullen
President

SM/ddt