



August 17, 2020

Hon. Randy Delorey
Department of Health and Wellness
1894 Barrington Street
Halifax, NS. B3J 2R8

Dear Minister Delorey,

Our province's healthcare crisis continues to be the number one issue impacting every Nova Scotian. We continue to have a healthcare system where thousands continue to struggle to access primary healthcare, mental health and addiction services, long-term care placements and communities – often rural – throughout Nova Scotia are too often negatively impacted by hospital closures.

Our province's ambulance service is another part of the broken system. Over many years, the intolerable inadequacies of the system have been brought to your attention many times. I have raised the issues with you in writing and on the floor of the Legislature. After years of ongoing neglect from your government, the ambulance system is suffering and quite possibly, in its worst condition ever. This is a matter of public safety, and in many instances, life or death. I ask you to take urgent action to prevent loss of life.

The work that the 1,200 paramedics provide to Nova Scotians is invaluable and those dedicated men and women are doing the best they can with what resources they have. I commend them for their hard work and commitment to our province.

The provincial ambulance system is a complex system plagued with various problems including:

- An increase in emergency, urgent and transfer call volume. Ambulances are tied up more frequently and for longer periods of time, resulting in less availability.
- An increasing demand in our emergency rooms.
- An increasing demand for long-term care, resulting in a backlog in acute care beds which trickles down to emergency rooms. Our Party's long-term care plan – *Dignity for our Seniors* – will help address this backlog.
- Continuous hospital closures due to doctor and nursing shortages.

- Unfilled ambulance shifts due to insufficient paramedic human resources. There are obviously not enough paramedics to meet our current system's demands as it is structured at present. Paramedics are overworked and underappreciated. Far too often, they have shift overruns that add up to four hours of involuntary overtime after an already long 12-hour shift. The job is mentally and physically demanding. Unfortunately, vacation requests are being denied resulting in fatigue and burnout.
- Poor ambulance availability (very few ambulances covering vast territories) leads to paramedics being stationed on the side of roadways, overpasses and parking lots without access to a bathroom for hours.
- Extended response times due to poor ambulance availability result in prolonged response times.

We are supposed to have – and at one time did have -- a world class ambulance service. Your government has turned a blind eye to the system and is failing both paramedics and Nova Scotians.

I have called on your government many times to release the \$145,000 taxpayer funded Fitch & Associates Report, but have yet to see this document produced. This speaks to your government's unfortunate and ongoing desire to keep things secret.

Nova Scotians deserve to know the current realities of our emergency service. I applaud the International Union of Operating Engineers for resuming their public awareness campaigns and agree that #NSDeservesBetter.

Minister Delorey, I ask you if it is acceptable that:

- There are reports of only three ambulances providing coverage from Yarmouth to Halifax?
- More than 10-15% of ambulances are unstaffed during a 12-hour shift?
- Paramedics are told to wait outside a hospital with their patient for extended periods of time since there is no room for them?
- Offload delays persist throughout the province resulting in 10-15% (in addition to unstaffed ambulances) being unavailable?
- Some patients must wait double or triple the acceptable amount of time for paramedics to arrive on scene?

The frightening state of the broken system and working conditions are weighing heavy on the minds of paramedics. If action is not taken to immediately address the issues of the ambulance system, there is an increased possibility of worsened injury and worse, loss of life for Nova Scotians. This should not rest easy with you and every member of your government.

Although a company operates the ambulance system in our province under a performance-based contract, it is you and your government's responsibility to ensure that Nova Scotians have a reliable and consistent ambulance service across the province. What is going to be your answer to Nova Scotian families who call on you for an explanation for an adverse event or loss of life due to this broken system?

How much worse does the system need to get before there is change?

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Colton LeBlanc".

Colton LeBlanc
MLA, Argyle-Barrington