

September 8, 2004

Mr. Chairman, members of the Electoral Boundaries Commission:

My name is Robert Thompson and I am chairman of the District of Belfast-Pownal Bay P.C. Association- the former 4th Queens District or the historic Belfast District.

Mr. Chairman, we are extremely disappointed with the proposed changes to our District. The Interim Report of the PEI Electoral Boundaries Commission (June 30, 2004) proposes to remove portions of our present District #6 and place them in the newly proposed districts of Nos. 21, 22 and 25. This report also calls for the addition of a large area of District #5 consisting of Murray River, Murray Harbour and Beach Point. These areas Mr. Chairman, represent a distinct, closely knit community with which our District has had little involvement in terms of "communities of interest" are concerned. Mr. Chairman, we believe that the Murray River, Murray Harbour and

Beach Point areas have a much stronger connection with the town of Montague than to any area within District #6.

Mr. Chairman, we have in District #6 over many years built our schools, our churches our hockey rinks, community organizations and political structures. These efforts have bonded our communities together and have crossed ethnic, religious and political lines. We have worked hard to build our communities and to improve the lifestyle and well being for the benefit of every resident within these communities; and to make changes now will interfere with these close and personal relationships.

Mr. Chairman, we wish to make a few remarks about political organization. It is not always easy in our busy society today, to keep political parties fully organized. The proposed changes, if accepted by government, would require a complete restructuring of district executives and individual poll working groups. In fact, virtually every poll in District #6 would be disrupted. Reorganization would not be a simple task for any of the political parties affected by the proposed changes to our District's boundaries. The proposed addition of the Murray River, Murray Harbour

and Beach Point areas as part of District 23 would lead to an excessively long geographic area which would limit regular meetings of party organizations. In addition, a new school district would be divided between ridings which could compromise quick resolution of emerging issues.

Mr. Chairman, Section 17 of the Electoral Boundaries Act lists a number of factors which would guide the Commission in its review of electoral boundary reform. Section (1) subsection (c) of the Act states that polling divisions from the most recent general election shall be taken into consideration. We were disappointed that the Commission chose not to respect this section of the Act as stated on page 4, statement No. 17 of **Goals Principles and Facts**. We have found that each time boundary changes are made it leads to confusion and exasperation with voters and leads to lower turn out at the polls. In addition, Mr Chairman, confusion within the electorate is often exacerbated where rural route post office designations conflict with electoral district boundaries. In many areas throughout the present district of Belfast-Pownal Bay, voters often receive political mail-outs from candidates who may not be

running in a given voters district- thus compromising the electoral process. Mr. Chairman, in these days of advanced Geographical Information Systems, mapping technology exists that will easily align population statistics with other information bases including Canada Post's distribution routes. Mr. Chairman, we recommend that the Commission include Canada Post rural route postal distribution routes as part of the electoral boundaries review process.

Mr. Chairman, we would like to comment on the proposed establishment of the new District of Pownal (#22) which would include 1,250 electors in the town of Stratford and approximately 2,300 electors from various communities adjoining the Stratford town boundaries. Mr. Chairman, we don't believe that combining these rural areas (ie. Alexandra, Pownal, Earnscliffe, Bunbury, Mt. Herbert) with the urban population of Stratford is in the best interest of either those electors residing in the Stratford area or in the adjacent rural communities. The interests which electors living in the Stratford area in government policies related to health care, transportation, education, is distinct from the rural area of our District which is comprised of electors

with social and economic interests in agriculture, fisheries and tourism activities. Mr. Chairman, over the years numerous conflicts have been reported by citizens complaining about agricultural sprays and the smell of livestock manure, particularly in the communities of Bunbury, Mount Herbert, and Mermaid. Combining these areas under one District is surely to yield consequences which would not be easily resolved.

Mr. Chairman, the proposed removal of the largely agricultural communities of Alexandra, Pownal, and the Earnscliffe peninsula areas is deemed a loss to historic Belfast-Pownal Bay.

Mr. Chairman, we can't emphasize enough the importance of leaving our District together. At the provincial level, we recommend the addition of the new ridings in Charlottetown and Summerside, however we strongly urge you to keep our rural ridings intact as previously established under the provisions of Part II of the Electoral Boundaries Act, R.S.P.E.I. 1988.

Mr. Chairman, our present government has campaigned and governed on the basis of strengthening our rural communities. By reducing the number of seats in

Kings County, we are in fact defeating the principles of this government and one of the foundations on which it was elected.

Mr. Chairman and members of the PEI Electoral Boundaries Commission, I thank you for the opportunity on behalf of the PC Party of Belfast-Pownal Bay to make this presentation.