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### **Re: NBSA Report Post Provincial General Election 2020**

As an organization that advocates for equitable, affordable, inclusive and accessible opportunities for all, the New Brunswick Student Alliance (NBSA) is disappointed to see how voters, especially young voters and voters with accessibility needs, were turned away from exercising their right to vote in the 2020 New Brunswick provincial general election. The NBSA recognizes the concerns brought forward by many students across the province and calls upon ElectionsNB to address those concerns and take necessary actions where required.

With a snap election being called on August 17, 2020 for September 14, 2020, we recognize the time constraints presented to ElectionsNB. However, this does not excuse the lack of accessibility to voting, the voter suppression and/or the breach of voting rights experienced by many eligible voters in the 2020 provincial general election.

The New Brunswick Student Alliance is calling on ElectionsNB to open an investigation into the matters presented in this document and take concrete action to ensure all voters in New Brunswick are able to cast their ballot.

### **Students Prevented from Voting**

#### **Enforcement of False Election Regulations**

Students voting in a provincial election do not have to be in the province within the last 40 consecutive days if they are a returning student who attended a post-secondary institution the previous year. ElectionsNB staff at a Memramcook-Tantramar polling station disregarded this regulation, which had been previously confirmed by the province's Chief Returning Officer before election day and multiple times throughout election day. Polling station staff directly disobeyed directives from the Chief Returning Officer and turned away students who were within the 40 consecutive day exception. Many students had to return to the polls a second time to cast their ballot, some even a



fourth time. Students may have decided not to return to vote due to barriers put in place by staff and officials.

*“When I arrived, I was told there was confusion over whether as a student I counted towards “being a resident for 40 days prior to the election”, despite I had a lease starting May 1st, and was turned away from voting.” - 5th Year Student*

*“I have been physically in the province since May, and even though that is not a requirement, the polling officers were questioning if I had been in the province for the last 40 days. They severely doubted I had been in the province even though that’s not the requirement, they tried to deny me.” - 4th Year Student*

#### Rejection of Legitimate Documents

Polling stations rejected letters from university residences confirming their current address and residency in New Brunswick. Students at Mount Allison University faced changing regulations, as the letters were accepted and then rejected at different points on election day. Letters confirming their residency provided by universities have always been adequate documentation and were used in the previous provincial election.

#### Inappropriate Questions and Behaviour

Students at Mount Allison University were questioned much more heavily than at other polling stations across the province. Many young voters in Memramcook-Tantramar were asked if they were students upon entry and if they have lived in the province for the past 40 days, even though this was not a campus or student specific polling station. These questions had no relevance to their voting, as it is not required to identify yourself as a student to vote and for returning students it is not necessary to be in the province for the past 40 days. Many students reported feeling belittled by ElectionsNB staff, including excessive questioning while presenting all necessary documentation, and inappropriate outbursts by polling station staff. This was very intimidating for many student voters, especially first-time voters, and may have discouraged them from casting their ballot.

*“The poll workers continuously belittled me, questioned my credentials, argued about if I was able to vote, discriminated against me because I was a student and threatened me with the oath on the bottom of the voter registration form.” - 2nd Year Student*



## **Mail-In Ballots**

During a meeting between the Chief Electoral Officer, our Executive Director and our Chair, ElectionsNB advised that students should be encouraged to vote by mail to mitigate the barriers of not having on campus polling stations as well as to avoid crowds at polling stations on election day. However, many out of province eligible voters, students included, have come forward saying that either they did not receive their special ballots in the mail, or they received their ballots on election day which did not give them enough time to mail it back or their ballots were sent to the wrong mailing address.

In an [interview with CBC New Brunswick](#), posted online on August 31, 2020, Paul Harpelle, spokesperson for ElectionsNB noted that voters who are uncomfortable about physically heading to the polls have been encouraged to apply for a mail-in ballot. The NBSA is disappointed to see that while mail-in ballots were being encouraged by ElectionsNB, the latter failed to ensure that eligible voters outside the province or their district exercise their right to vote.

*“I am from New Brunswick, but currently living in another province to attend university. I contacted ElectionsNB to request my mail in ballot weeks in advance, they provided me with two phone numbers to call and both were not connected. I was finally able to submit the request by email and my special ballot arrived the Thursday before election day. My vote was never counted.” - 5th Year Student*

## **Accessibility of Polling Stations**

Many polling stations and returning offices across the province were not physically accessible for those with accessibility needs. Many locations did not have ramps or automatic doors, creating barriers for students and all voters with accessibility needs. The New Brunswick Student Alliance is disappointed in the lack of consideration made when setting up polling stations and returning offices.

*“Because of the lack of voting stations on campus, I went to my local returning office to vote before returning to university, only to find that the building was inaccessible. There was no ramp or push buttons and if I hadn’t had someone with me, I wouldn’t have been able to vote even though I took all the right steps to do so.” - UNB Student*



## **No Polling Stations on Campuses**

On August 24, 2020, the NBSA released a statement expressing our disappointment upon learning that there would be no advanced polling stations on campuses for the 2020 provincial election. Partnering with ElectionsNB to have voting stations on campus has fared well in the past with alleviating confusion around provincial voting systems, especially for post-secondary students who are mostly first-time voters. According to the 2018 Report of the Chief Electoral Officer, the percentage of voters aged 18-24 for 2018 was 50.4% compared to 44.1% in 2014. As further highlighted in the report, more than 7,500 electors voted for a candidate in their home electoral district by casting a special ballot outside of their district, which included post-secondary students who voted on campus. Just over 3,400 ballots were casted at the 18 different campus voting stations, representing a 19% increase over the votes on campuses in the 2014 provincial election. ElectionsNB provided no notice of this decision and did not inform student groups until the New Brunswick Student Alliance reached out. This decision to eliminate on campus voting added to the barriers to voting listed throughout this document and could have helped alleviate many of the issues presented.