

Grits make third attempt to get access fees lowered

Liberals want fees scaled from \$25 to \$5

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The Liberals are hoping they don't strike out on their third try at getting the Tories to lower access to information fees.

Interim leader Michel Samson wants the application fee under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act scaled back to \$5 from the current \$25. The Tories brought in the 400 per cent increase in 2002.

Nova Scotia fees, including the \$25 appeal cost, are among the highest in the country.

Mr. Samson said the increase has deterred people from asking for information. In 2002, there were 1,037 requests, compared to 761 last year.

"We believe this amendment is necessary to make the fees more accessible to Nova Scotians, and by extension, the government more accountable to the people it represents," Mr. Samson said.

Although there are no assurances yet, Justice Minister Murray Scott acknowledged that his department is looking at whether fees should be lowered.

"There's no question that most jurisdictions are lower than ours and it's something I'm concerned about and do want to take a look at," Mr. Scott said. "We don't want the province to be known as they have the highest in the country."

Mr. Scott said the province collects about \$35,000 a year through fees but that doesn't cover the cost of compiling the information.

Darce Fardy, who was the province's freedom of information review officer for 11 years, said he always thought that increasing fees was a bad idea. He's now leading the Right to Know Coalition, a group which is lobbying to get the application fee restored to \$5 and to eliminate the \$25 fee for a review.

Mr. Samson also wants the government to prohibit the release of an applicant's name, except as necessary to comply with the request.

The New Democrats have also called for lower fees over the past several years.

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