

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
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de l'Ontario

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**Official Report  
of Debates  
(Hansard)**

HE-18

**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

HE-18

**Standing Committee  
on Heritage, Infrastructure  
and Cultural Policy**

Better Regional Governance  
Act, 2026

1<sup>st</sup> Session  
44<sup>th</sup> Parliament

Tuesday 28 April 2026

**Comité permanent du  
patrimoine, de l'infrastructure  
et de la culture**

Loi de 2026 pour une meilleure  
gouvernance régionale

1<sup>re</sup> session  
44<sup>e</sup> législature

Mardi 28 avril 2026

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Chair: Hon. Laurie Scott  
Clerk: Tanzima Khan

Présidente : L'hon. Laurie Scott  
Greffière : Tanzima Khan

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE,  
INFRASTRUCTURE  
AND CULTURAL POLICY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DU PATRIMOINE,  
DE L'INFRASTRUCTURE  
ET DE LA CULTURE**

Tuesday 28 April 2026

Mardi 28 avril 2026

*The committee met at 0901 in room 151.*

**BETTER REGIONAL GOVERNANCE  
ACT, 2026  
LOI DE 2026 POUR UNE MEILLEURE  
GOUVERNANCE RÉGIONALE**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 100, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Municipal Elections Act, 1996 / Projet de loi 100, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2001 sur les municipalités et la Loi de 1996 sur les élections municipales.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy to order.

We're meeting today to begin public hearings on Bill 100, an Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Municipal Elections Act, 1996.

The Clerk of the Committee has distributed today's meeting documents virtually via SharePoint.

To ensure that everyone who speaks is heard and understood, it is important that all participants speak slowly and clearly.

Please wait until I recognize you before starting to speak. As always, all comments should go through the Chair.

Are there any questions before we begin?

I will now call on Minister Flack, who is joining us virtually.

Minister, good morning. You have 20 minutes to make an opening statement, followed by 39 minutes of questions from the members of the committee. The time for questions will be divided into two rounds of six and a half minutes for the government members, two rounds of six and a half minutes for the official opposition members and two rounds of six and a half minutes for the third party. Any questions?

Minister, you may begin.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Thank you, Chair. Can—

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** I apologize. I'm sorry. MPP Gates, yes.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** You never looked up. You did your hearing extremely well there.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** I looked up the first time, not the second.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Is there an opportunity to make an opening comment before we get into the minister? We normally do that, because you said—we had your hand up, but you were just reading. I just want to give the chance to the Chair to say a couple of words on the committee.

*Interjections.*

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Yes. The Clerk says you're allowed to. It's a quick question more than anything. Do you have a quick question about—

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** My question—and I guess it's a question—is, how are people supposed to be able to appear before committee when there's hardly any notification? You can tell just by the number of people that are—almost everyone is appearing virtually. Many of them, obviously, have been prompted by the government. And so, I would like to ask how exactly we came to the process of having a committee meeting with almost no notice?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** MPP Burch, consulting with the Clerk, that's not a question that will be entertained at this point in time. We gave you a few minutes to make a statement but—

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** The question was just, how did we come to the decision to have almost no notice for the meeting? Who ultimately decided that was a good way to run the committee?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** I believe the subcommittee met, and MPP Saunderson was on that subcommittee. I'll ask MPP Saunderson—he's got his hand up—if you want to make a couple comments.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Yes, absolutely. We met last week and discussed the process and made the schedule.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** MPP Gates.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I don't have a question. I guess what we're trying to say is, this is extremely important right across the province of Ontario because of the number of communities that we have. And we're saying there wasn't enough time. For me, I was trying to do stuff last night to try to get ready for today, but there wasn't enough time to notify stakeholders. When you have an important situation like this, why is it being forced through committee?

We just want to say that we disagree with it. We think it's wrong. We think that we should have had more time. I want to get that on record, just like Jeff wanted to get it on the record.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Okay, MPP Gates. I believe there's a subcommittee that occurred last week, so we're going to go forward.

MPP Saunderson.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** I don't want to drag this out too long, but part of the reason for expediting this process is that we want to have this bill back before the Legislature for third reading because May 1 is the date in which municipal candidates can start declaring for election. We want them to understand, if this bill is passed, the changes that will be made to their regional councils in advance. So Simcoe county and Niagara region will reduce their number of municipal councillors. We want them to know that as the election starts. That is part of the reason for this.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Okay, thank you very much.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I appreciate that. The reality is you could have—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** MPP Gates, we're going to move on with the start.

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** You're still talking.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Just to correct—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** MPP Burch.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** —MPP Saunderson: there are no regional councillors because they took them all away.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Well, MPP Burch, you will have minutes for questions, so we can discuss that at the appropriate time. Right now, it's Minister Flack's time.

#### MINISTRY OF MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS AND HOUSING

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** You can begin, Minister, when you're ready. You have up to 20 minutes.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Colleagues and everyone online, good morning. It's great to be here. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to speak to Bill 100, the Better Regional Governance Act, 2026, and speak to the ways in which this legislation is necessary at this moment in Ontario's history.

We are confronting a simple but pressing reality: Ontario is growing, sometimes rapidly, sometimes not so much, but always steadily. We are a growing province. People continue to choose this province as the best place to live, work and raise a family. That growth is a sign of confidence in our economy and in our communities, but it also places real and immediate pressure on our systems of housing, on our systems of infrastructure and on the capacity of our governments to respond effectively.

At the same time, we are navigating economic uncertainty, rising construction costs and persistent—and I repeat, persistent—delays in approvals at the municipal and regional levels. This consequence is clear. It takes too long and it costs too much to build homes in Ontario. This is not an abstract problem. It has real impacts on families, on workers and on communities trying to plan for their future.

Our government has been clear from the outset. We are taking decisive action to address those barriers, whatever they may be. We have invested in infrastructure, removed or reformed approval processes and worked to align policy across ministries and all levels of governance.

But through all of this work, one conclusion has become unavoidable: Governance matters, structures matter, performance matters and results matter. How decisions are made is just as important as what decisions are made. If governance structures are slow, fragmented or misaligned, even the best policies will struggle to deliver results. That is what Bill 100 is designed to help solve.

This legislation is about ensuring that regional governance in Ontario is equipped to meet the demands of today's challenges. It is about creating the conditions for faster decision-making, better coordination, clearer accountability and consistency. Ultimately, it is about one thing: getting more homes built, supported by the infrastructure communities need now and in a way that is timely, predictable and cost-effective. This is not change for its own sake. It is targeted, deliberate modernization grounded in a clear objective: protecting Ontario's future by ensuring our communities can grow and succeed.

Bill 100 introduces a focused set of reforms to strengthen how regional governments operate, particularly in areas experiencing significant growth pressures, notably Simcoe county and the Niagara region. At its core, this legislation does three things: It provides consistent leadership at the regional level, it streamlines governance structures where they have become inefficient and it improves alignment between provincial and municipal priorities so that decisions can be made more quickly and more effectively.

(1) The bill enables the province to appoint regional chairs in specific upper-tier municipalities, building on authorities that already exist and have been used in parts of Ontario. This is not a novel concept. It is an evolution of an approach that has already demonstrated good results.

#### 0910

(2) It extends strong-chair powers similar to strong-mayor powers to these positions. These are targeted authorities designed to advance shared provincial-municipal priorities, particularly housing and infrastructure. They are not broad or unchecked powers. They are focused tools to ensure that critical decisions are made and do not stall success.

(3) The bill streamlines council composition in regions where size and structure have become barriers to effective governance. In Niagara and Simcoe, for example, council sizes would be adjusted to better reflect the provincial average and to improve efficiency and accountability.

Each of these elements responds directly to a problem we have identified through experience.

On leadership, today there is no consistent method for selecting heads of regional councils. Some are elected, some are appointed by a county council, and some are appointed by the province. This patchwork creates inconsistency, unaccountability and unalignment while also introducing inherent self-interests where none should be present.

Regions work for the municipalities. I want to emphasize this: It's not the other way around. Regions work for the municipalities they support. They do not supersede the municipalities.

At a time when coordination is essential, inconsistency becomes a barrier. By enabling provincial appointments in key regions, we're creating greater consistency and ensuring that leadership is aligned with the shared goal of delivering housing and critical infrastructure. This is about clarity of purpose. It's about ensuring that everyone is working toward the same outcomes.

On strong-chair powers, we have already seen the impact of these tools at the municipal level. They help prioritize key projects, streamline processes and keep decisions moving. Extending these powers to the regional level is a logical next step.

Regional governments are responsible for many of the systems that enable housing: water, waste water, transportation, planning and policing. If decisions at this level are delayed, the entire system slows down to a crawl. These powers are carefully scoped. They are tied to advancing provincial priorities. They are accountable. They are designed to remove bottlenecks, not to override the democratic process.

On council size and structure, in some regions, governance has simply become unwieldy. Large councils can lead to duplication, prolonged debate and delayed decisions. In Niagara, for example, the size of council is disproportionate to its population. That has real impacts and consequences on the pace of decision-making.

By streamlining these structures we're improving efficiency while maintaining representation through locally elected mayors. This is about ensuring that councils are functional, focused and able to deliver results.

Taken together, these changes reflect a coherent approach. We're not altering the fundamentals of local governance. Municipal councils remain elected. Local voices remain central. What we are doing is strengthening the framework within which those voices also operate so that decisions can be made effectively.

This is also part of a broader strategy. Our government has made historic investments in municipal infrastructure, and we have reformed approvals through these processes. We have introduced measures to reduce costs and accelerate development. Bill 100 complements these actions by ensuring governance structures do not undermine the progress we are making throughout the province. Because ultimately, the goal is not simply to change governance. The goal is to deliver better outcomes such as more homes, better infrastructure and stronger communities.

I want to turn now to one of the most frequently raised critiques of this legislation: the question of democratic legitimacy, particularly with respect to the appointment of regional chairs. This is an important issue, and it deserves a clear and direct response.

First, it is essential to understand the role of a regional chair. Regional governments do not replace local democracy. They were never meant to do that. They support it. The primary decision-makers at the regional level are the

mayors and the councillors who are directly elected by their communities. They bring forward the priorities of their residents. The chair's role is fundamentally different. It's to facilitate, to coordinate and to ensure that the work of council proceeds effectively. It does not dictate outcomes or override the will of elected representatives.

In that sense, the chair's function is much like the chair of a board of directors, guiding discussions, setting agendas and helping to bring members together around shared priorities. This is the goal.

While disagreements will arise—they always do, and should, quite frankly—the chair's role is simple: serve in the best interest of the collective whole. The region, not any one person, community or interest, should be at the fore. This is particularly important in regional governments, where multiple municipalities with different perspectives must work together.

Second, appointed chairs are not new to Ontario. They are already a feature of our municipal system. In fact, a significant portion of Ontario's population currently lives in regions with appointed leadership. Over half of all the citizens who live in the Peel and York regions live under provincially appointed chairs. Simply put, Chair, it is working.

Furthermore, the history of regional government is one of non-elected chairs, just as how the county system works much across Ontario. This is not a departure from precedent. It is an extension of a model that has been used for decades and has evolved over time to meet changing needs in Ontario.

Third, the changes proposed in Bill 100 do not diminish democratic accountability. Local councils remain elected. Mayors remain elected. They continue to make decisions, set budgets and represent their communities. What the legislation does do is ensure that the individual facilitating that process, the chair, is aligned with the broader objective of delivering results in areas where coordination across municipalities is critical.

It is also important to emphasize that appointments, as have been made in the past in Peel and York, as I noted, are not arbitrary. These chairs will be proven leaders, selected based on merit, experience and integrity and vetted by the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario, as all must do already. This ensures that those appointed are credible, qualified and capable of fulfilling the responsibilities of the chair role.

Finally, I would address the broader concern about centralization. This legislation is not about centralizing power at the provincial level—far from it. It is about improving coordination across levels of government. Regional governments exist precisely because of certain challenges like infrastructure and planning across municipal boundaries. They come together with the region to bring scale, to bring critical mass, so we can bring that value to the ratepayer.

Addressing those challenges effectively requires alignment. It requires leadership that can bring municipalities together and work in partnership with the province. That is what this legislation enables and improves, frankly. In fact, by improving coordination and reducing delays, we

are strengthening the ability of local governments to deliver for their residents.

When we speak about democratic legitimacy, we must consider not only how leaders are selected but how effectively the system delivers for the people it serves. Ontarians expect results. The provincial government and our Premier expect results. They expect homes to be built on time, infrastructure to be delivered on time and decisions to be made in a timely way. Bill 100 is designed to meet those expectations.

In addition, Chair, I want to take a moment to underscore how these reforms fit with the broader principle that has guided our work from the beginning. That word is partnership. Strong communities are built when orders of government are working together with clarity, with purpose and with a shared understanding of what needs to be achieved. That is what Ontarians expect. They do not distinguish between municipal, regional and provincial responsibilities when they're trying to find a home, when they're sitting in congested traffic or when they are waiting for infrastructure to catch up with growth. They expect their governments to function as one system, coordinated, responsive and focused on results to their benefit.

What Bill 100 does do is reinforce a partnership by ensuring that regional governance is not a point of friction within that system but a point of strength. It recognizes that regional governments occupy a unique and critical space. They bring the scale and critical mass of a group of regional municipalities together to hopefully deliver better value for their taxpayers. That is the purpose of regional government. They are responsible for infrastructure systems that enable growth, water, waste water, transportation corridors and long-range planning along with public safety. When those systems work well, growth happens effectively. When they do not, everything slows down to a grind. That is why alignment matters. That is why clarity in leadership matters. And that is why the ability to make timely decisions matters.

**0920**

Through this legislation, we are ensuring that regional governments are better positioned to fulfill that role. We are equipping them with leadership that can bring municipalities together, tools that can keep decisions moving and structures that support efficiency rather than delay.

I would also emphasize that this is not a one-size-fits-all approach imposed without consideration of local realities. The changes proposed for Niagara and Simcoe, for example, reflect specific challenges and locally identified needs. In Simcoe, there has already been significant local work to examine council size and structure. In Niagara, concerns about efficiency and effectiveness have been well documented for months, if not years, if not decades. What we are doing is building on that local input and providing a pathway to implement solutions that might otherwise remain out of reach. This is about enabling progress, not dictating it.

As we look ahead, it is important to recognize that modernization is not a one-time exercise. Governance systems must evolve as conditions change. The pressures

we are facing today—rapid population growth, infrastructure demands and economic uncertainty—are different in scale and complexity from those that existed when regional governments were first established. Our responsibility is to ensure that our institutions evolve accordingly. Bill 100 reflects that responsibility. It is a measured, thoughtful response to the realities we see on the ground. It is informed by experience and by engagement with municipal partners and by a clear understanding of where the system is working and where the system is not working. Most importantly, it is focused on outcomes, because at the end of the day, success will not be measured by the structure of governance alone. It will be measured by whether more homes are built, whether infrastructure keeps pace, and growth, and gets implemented in an effective way and whether communities across Ontario remain places where people can build their lives with confidence in the future. That is the standard we are holding ourselves to, and that is the standard this legislation is designed to meet.

Chair, I will conclude by returning to the central question before us: Why does this matter? It matters because governance is not an abstract concept. It has real consequences for how quickly homes can be built, how effectively infrastructure is delivered and how effectively communities can respond to the growth they are seeing.

When governance systems are slow and fragmented, the impacts are felt by families looking for housing—their first house, their downsizing house, their purpose-built rental, their social housing—also by businesses trying to invest and by municipalities trying to plan for the future. We cannot afford these delays any longer.

Bill 100 is about ensuring that our governance structures match the scale and urgency of the challenges we face. It's about strengthening leadership, improving coordination and creating the conditions for faster, more predictable decision-making. It's about aligning all orders of government around a shared objective, and that's getting shovels in the ground faster, building the infrastructure and homes that support strong growing communities.

This legislation does not replace local voices; in fact, it supports them. It provides the tools and structures needed to ensure that those voices can translate into action. Ultimately, it's about protecting Ontario, protecting our ability to grow and how we grow. It's about protecting our economic competitiveness, about protecting our opportunity for families to find a place they call home. The decisions we make today will shape the future of this province for decades to come. That line has been used for generations, but it still is true: Chair, the decisions we make today will shape the future of the province for decades to come.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to this important legislation this morning, and then I'll happily answer any of your questions.

Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you, Minister, for your presentation.

We're going to start the questioning for six and a half minutes with the government side. MPP Saunderson.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Thank you, Minister, for your presentation this morning.

We've talked many times about the pressures in Ontario and the housing crisis. This government has been working through an iterative process to try and address these issues moving forward, in particular the role of governance.

I come from Simcoe county and served on Simcoe county council, so I know first-hand about some of the pressures you're talking about. I was wondering if you could just outline for committee the interplay that happens between regional and the Simcoe county government and the province, and what you have seen in terms of maybe speed bumps in that existing structure, and how this legislation is designed to streamline that to increase co-ordination so that we can get moving on these provincial priority issues?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Well, thank you, MPP Saunderson—a great question.

As you know, coming from Simcoe county, you and I collectively have seen the challenges that you have just identified. As the parliamentary assistant to our ministry, you've also been very much involved in the comings and goings of all things Simcoe.

Simcoe is a fantastic place. It is a massive county. And probably, if you could look back in time, it may be—I don't want to call it too big, but it maybe is too big based on the realities of today. When you take a look at Simcoe and you take a look at the GTA, and how it has grown, how it has expanded—I will admit, when I was a young fellow driving up there selling feed with Masterfeeds, never did I think we would see the growth that we see in Simcoe county today. So, like the rest of the province, it's been hard to digest that growth.

Frankly, south Simcoe is going to be the new York, the new Peel, the new Durhams of the GTHA. It's growing that fast. Look at the infrastructure we've been investing in, look at the homes that need to be built, look at the investments in economic developments such as Honda. It continues to grow.

So we need to make sure that we're responsive. That's why we're approving the official plans as fast as we can. That's why OPA 7 is being dealt with effectively. That's why we're looking at the basic infrastructure we need. And we need a regional council that can work effectively. Thirty-two members of that council is not efficient. It does not provide good governance, in my humble opinion. That is why we're changing it. It is important that we streamline that particular system, like Niagara. Thirty-two doesn't work, so we're going to go down to 17—16, plus a chair—and, again, representing all of Simcoe county in a more effective and broad way. And that includes whether it's through the service managers, through homelessness funding, whether it's through getting more shovels in the ground faster for critical infrastructure.

And I would point out, in Simcoe county—and I think you will agree, MPP Saunderson—looking at municipal service corporations—again, publicly owned—is a critical need in Simcoe county that we can help advance in a more meaningful way under the benefits of Bill 100.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that answer.

There were a couple of comments you made during your presentation this morning about respecting the democratic process and local representation. And part of that comes by recognizing the division of powers, essentially, between the regional or upper-tier government and the lower-tier municipalities. My understanding is this legislation is aimed at dealing with the governance model for the upper tier, but it's not changing the jurisdiction of each of the local tiers.

I'm wondering if you could just speak to how we're not interfering with local representation at the municipal level but really looking at the upper tiers to try and streamline that.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Simcoe will basically act like a county council and, ultimately, Niagara will as well. The mayor is representing their local communities. Take a look at the county system throughout the province—I think it has been around since there weren't municipalities. You bring the collective good—scale and critical mass for a particular geography or region—together, and you look at water, waste water, policing, social services, whatever it may be that you can do by scale. And when you do that effectively, you represent the municipalities that it represents.

Every one of these mayors in Simcoe that is going to sit on county council represents their local constituents. They have the voice. They are the regional council. And I think people, over time, have mistaken the fact that municipalities serve the regional council. It's the other way around; the regional council is meant to be, again, that collective good for bringing scale together to get shovels in the ground faster—more efficient, better scale, better costing, better value for the ratepayer.

**0930**

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** You have 60 seconds.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** When you've got a mayor sitting at the table representing their particular region, it works and will continue to work. And I believe Simcoe will work more effectively, especially with all the growth—massive growth—we're seeing in Simcoe county. So thank you for those questions.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** You have 36 seconds.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** I'll slide a quick one in, if I can.

Minister, I understand that, of the regional chairs that are in existence today, only 20% are actually elected by the residents; 80% are appointed by a level of government—either the province or the local government. Just if you have time for comment: Do you see this change—or evolution, as you refer to it—reducing any kind of democratic representation of our residents?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** You have 10 seconds.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** I do not. Some 50% of the people who live under regional government in Ontario are in Peel and York, and it's working there.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** We'll now continue questions. Over to MPP Burch for the official opposition.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Good morning, Minister.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Good morning, Jeff. How are you?

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** I'm good.

Look, I want to start off by saying that, obviously, we on the opposition side see this bill as a serious attack on local democracy, but I want to cut through the opinion and just get to the basis of what this bill actually does. It gives this government and its unelected, hand-picked chairs unprecedented power over regional municipal budgets and operations. There's no doubt about that. It takes power away from municipal taxpayers and their elected representatives. So the effort to make this sound as if it's more democratic quite frankly flies in the face of what the bill actually does.

It allows the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to appoint the regional chairs of Durham, Halton, Muskoka, Niagara, Peel, Waterloo and York, as well as the warden of Simcoe county. So people's property taxes are going to be set by someone they never elected and can never remove. The appointed regional chairs will control billions of dollars in municipal budgets with no accountability to the people paying the bills.

The unelected chair would also gain so-called strong-mayor powers, which I know we've heard that they've been successful in Ontario, but there's absolutely no evidence to show that there's been any success whatsoever. But those hand-picked appointees can set regional budgets, hire and fire the regional administrator and top staffers, and pass bylaws with the support of just one third of council. That's not democratic.

In my conversations with local councillors, I have to say they've felt really disrespected through the process and I've been waiting for an opportunity to address that issue. In March, the Premier came to Niagara and there are a number of councillors who—the appointed regional chair had thrown Niagara into a state of chaos by pushing a forced amalgamation scheme. A lot of the councillors had a problem with that, in both upper and lower tiers. And the Premier came into town and called them all turkeys.

I'm just wondering—I served on council as a part-time councillor, just like hundreds of people all across the province. It's a hard job. I think I made a little over \$18,000; no office, no staff, running out of my house, phone calls about snowplowing in the middle of Christmas dinner. That's what you do as a part-time councillor. It's a really noble thing for citizens to step up and do.

I served two terms on St. Catharines council. I was the budget chair as well for a couple of years. And one of the councillors, Councillor Bruce Williamson, expressed his concern about the Premier's comments and I wanted to read that into the record. He said, "The disrespect and the contempt that Doug Ford has shown for local democracy is summed up by him labelling us as turkeys.... The Premier calls us turkeys, locally-elected representatives. I find it personally insulting and degrading to the many terrific" principled "councils I have served with in the past and continue to work with today, who have the courage to allow their name to stand for election to serve their friends and neighbours and local government.

"In turn, it is a repudiation of the people in this community, the little guys Ford claims to care about."

That's the emotion I got from the hard-working part-time councillors in our region. I wanted to give you an opportunity to say—do you agree that it's appropriate for the Premier to come into our region and call all of those elected representatives a bunch of turkeys?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Thank you for your comments, MPP Burch. We've had some good, spirited discussions about this, and I appreciate your input, especially from the fact that you and your partner in crime next to you are from the Niagara region.

Look, the bottom line is, anyone who puts their name on a ballot deserves to be respected. That being said, I think this government has done so.

Always remember, too: What the former chair presented to me and to our government in terms of reform was a recommendation. We had not accepted it. We listened to it. It was presented to and also reviewed by all of the mayors. They didn't agree with that particular analysis at the time, and we moved on. We didn't accept that original proposal.

A second one came in, and I did deal directly with every mayor, talked to every one of them directly—talked to you directly, talked to MPP Gates directly. I've talked to MPP and Minister Sam Oosterhoff directly. We listened, and so then we acted.

Bottom line in Niagara is—and you can agree or disagree—you've got more municipal politicians in the Niagara region than sit in the Legislature, 126 today. For the record, they are all still municipalities in place. They are councils or mayors that are still in place.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** With all respect, Minister, my question was about the regional chairs. Quite frankly, appointing Bob Gale—we all know that having a signed copy of Hitler's manifesto was not really the reason he resigned. He threw the region into chaos in only two months. It was a real—I mean, calling it a "shitshow" is polite. It was really, really bad.

That's the kind of person that your government—I don't know if it was you personally—picked as the chair. Is that what we can expect in the future? What kind of qualifications are you looking for? They just have to be a former Conservative candidate? What are the criteria?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Eight seconds.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** We're working on the criteria. Stay tuned. There will be a vetting process and a very strong due diligence.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you, Minister. I'm afraid we're out of time.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** No problem.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Moving on to the third party: MPP Blais.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Good morning, Minister.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Morning.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I presume you're appearing before us today from your riding, in Elgin–Middlesex–London.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** I am indeed.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** It's nice to be able to stay in your constituency during constituency week and not be forced to come to downtown Toronto. I'm sure you would agree.

Minister, when your government introduced strong-mayor powers, the justification for those powers was that they came with a direct mandate from voters. Is that still the view of your government?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Sorry, could you just repeat the last part of the question?

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** When your government introduced strong-mayor powers, the justification for those powers was that it came with a direct mandate from voters. I'm wondering if that is still the view of your government.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** The purpose of strong-mayor powers—and now strong-chair powers, should this legislation pass—is to align with provincial priorities, predominantly infrastructure and housing.

It's interesting that the opposition slams away at housing starts, which I understand and acknowledge have been difficult. We're trying to create the environment, the conditions to get more homes built faster. That's why we're enabling and giving those strong-chair powers to mayors and to regional chairs.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I appreciate that. Other than public oral statements, either from you, your previous minister or the Premier, is the list of subject matters where the mayor or now chairs can use these strong powers articulated in writing anywhere?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** They are for strong-mayor powers. We're working on those for strong-chair powers. They will be similar, in my opinion.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Your view is that they're limited in scope to issues that will facilitate housing, economic development, infrastructure and policing, I think is what you said during your remarks.

0940

**Hon. Rob Flack:** That is true. By the way, it's in the regulation. I don't have it in front of me, but if you read the regulation, you'll see—

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** That's fine. I'll take a look at that. Thank you.

Minister, can you articulate for us decisions made by regional councils that don't relate to infrastructure, housing, policing or economic development?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** No.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Okay, so effectively, then, the strong-chair powers will relate to all decisions made by regional council.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** No, they will not. They will be limited to—if you read the regulation, you will see exactly what the strong-mayor powers are meant to do.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** But Minister, you just said that you can't think of decisions that regional councils make that aren't related to housing, economic development, infrastructure or policing. And I would tend to agree with you.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Well, okay. Policing would be one; social services would be one that I don't think aligns with that, as two examples.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Sir, I thought you said policing would be an issue where strong-mayor powers could be used.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Where the provincial party lines up, yes, but if it doesn't, it's up to the chairs. Remember, with strong-mayor powers—take a look at how many times they've been used since they were put into regulation—very few. And taking a look at some of these regional governments, they don't act efficiently and effectively. This is to help move things along.

Some mayors have used, I would add, strong-mayor powers very effectively. Take a look at the mayor of London, to get housing done—with the council's full support, and also through budget processes.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Now, Minister, you said that the appointed chair, now coupled with strong-chair powers, will not override the will of elected officials. But if in order to pass a budget; in order to make a decision about housing locations; in order to make a decision about infrastructure, say, big roads or a water facility, a recreation facility; in order to make a decision about some other policing priority which is yet to be defined by your government, the chair only requires one third of council, how is one third of council plus an unelected chair not overriding the will of voters, whose representatives represent the other two thirds?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** As I've said many times, we will continue to monitor how they are used. If strong-mayor powers are abused, we will step in. Again, it's to regulation.

Take a look at the—if this had not been working for the most part in an effective way in Ontario already, we wouldn't have done this. They have been working. These chairs still have to work very closely with their regional councillors, albeit elected or the mayors that serve on those councils. And we've seen this work. It has worked in York, it has worked in Peel, and I am confident it will work in the regions in the months ahead.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** In fairness, Minister, neither in York nor in Peel can the chair override the will of the majority of an elected council—yet.

Minister, with the appointed regional chairs that will have this superpower to override elected officials, who will they be accountable to? Will they be accountable to you? Will they be accountable to the Premier? Who is ultimately the accountability mechanism there?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Well, the ultimate accountability, as I think we all know, are the people that elect these mayors, elect you, elect me, elect the Premier—

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** But the chair will be appointed and not elected.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** The chair will be accountable to his council, to the regional council, will also have accountability to ensuring the provincial priorities, tied in with municipal priorities, are implemented effectively.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Fifty-five seconds.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** So, the regional council will be able to remove the appointed chair, based on that accountability mechanism?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** I believe if there's issues and the regional councils are not happy, I'm sure they will communicate with me, to our government, and I will listen, like I have before and did so, for example, in Niagara.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Okay, but ultimately, though, the decision to remove the appointed strong chair will be yours, or the government's.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** That is the way the legislation looks today, but that doesn't mean—we communicate with them and also with all members—

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** We are here to consider amendments to that legislation. You would be open, then, to changing that particular aspect of the legislation to ensure more accountability?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** I don't think it needs to be changed, because it exists in the legislation before you today.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Nine seconds.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Yes, that's fine, Madam Chair. Thank you.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** And I would just point out, if I could, Chair—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Two seconds.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** I'm in my riding today because I'm doing government business, not riding business.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you very much, Minister.

We're going now to the second round of questioning for the government's side. MPP Sandhu.

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** Good morning, Minister. We appreciate you for appearing before the committee and for your presentation.

Even though you touched on that in your remarks, could you please speak to why speed and predictability in the planning and approval system are so important in this context, particularly given Ontario's housing demand and infrastructure pressures?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Thank you for the question. I've been in this role for a little over a year now, and the one thing that has come to me in a glaring way is how long it takes to get infrastructure and housing built. Again, I'm not blaming anyone in particular through the processes. We are just very bureaucratic.

I would preface my remarks by suggesting that we are in a very competitive world. When I talk to home builders that build on both sides of the border about economic development opportunities on both sides of the border, we as a municipal government, as a provincial government, have not been able to act nimbly enough. Whether it's the official plan process, whether it's the building code, whether it's—in my opinion, in some cases—overburdened studies and regulations, it just takes too long and costs too much to get housing and infrastructure built.

That's why we're changing this. This is part of the process. We are aligning ourselves to make speed our friend. So in the broader picture, I think what we are going to accomplish through this is the ability to do that.

Take a look at how effectively Peel region has worked. They are going to be the model. That's where you're from, from Brampton. Take a look at the municipal services corps that we are going to stand up. Peel is the pilot. Peel is one pilot; it'll be many more across the province, across all the regions, because there is an absolute need and an absolute desire to get those done, put those stood up.

We will continue to remove the red tape, remove the bureaucracy, remove the extended time it takes to get this critical infrastructure put in the ground, including housing.

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** MPP Babikian, please.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Good morning, Minister. Thank you very much for sharing your valuable input with the committee.

During the debate, we have heard criticism of the bill that you have just addressed. But there has been less discussion of how the current regional governance system is actually functioning in practice today and how it is coping under the current pressures.

Could you speak in more detail about what you see as the core structural challenges in the existing model, particularly around duplication of roles, misaligned priorities between upper- and lower-tier municipalities and delays in decision-making that can emerge when responsibilities are split across multiple layers of government?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Thank you for the question. I'll quote you some numbers just to prove the point. In the regional municipality of Peel, there are almost 1.5 million people. In the regional municipality of Niagara, there are 478,000 people. When you take a look at the size of the regional governments in both, it's disproportionate. You've got 31 regional councillors in Niagara and 25 in Peel—I could go through all these different numbers. The example in Niagara I will suggest is inefficiency.

While these people serve—and, respectfully, they serve and still serve and will until the end of their mandate in October when the municipal election exists—we are trying to bring consistency across these regions. There is no consistency, and there should be. It doesn't mean that local municipalities still can't have their local voice, can't represent their ratepayers in an effective way, but we need consistency. That is what this bill is trying to accomplish and, I believe, will accomplish.

Always, we are open. If there's improvements to be made in the years to come, we're willing to listen and learn. I think we all can acknowledge that.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Okay.

MPP Anand, there's a minute and a half.

**0950**

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Oh, that's great.

Thank you, Minister, for coming to the committee and representing here today. I just want to ask, adding onto what my colleague talked about: Where do you see the most significant gap between current outcomes and what is needed to meet projected growth? How have these gaps evolved in recent years as precious, as we all know, and the housing infrastructure capacity and municipal coordination have increased? Can you explain that to all of us?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** You have 50 seconds, Minister.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** In the region of Peel—and I grew up in Streetsville, and I remember when it was 6,000 people and Brampton was 40,000 people. I remember when regional government came into being. I was a young guy going to Streetsville Secondary School. Not a lot of people

liked it. We wanted to save our Streetsville and save our local communities—which we were able to do; it still exists today.

The reason for regional government was this growth was going to take place—massive growth. Little did we know how much it would grow. I know you live on the banks of the Credit River. That was my backyard and playground. But think, when I grew up there, that was farmers' fields. Today, you and your family and countless thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of people, enjoy that particular region.

It has continued to grow. We have to sit back and look and see how we're going to manage that growth.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you, Minister. I'm sorry; the time is up.

MPP Gates for the official opposition—you have six and a half minutes.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Good morning, Minister.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Good morning.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I just want to make a quick statement. Today is a Day of Mourning. I would rather be at Niagara-on-the-Lake where Joel Murray lost his life in GM. Wendy and the kids are there remembering Joel and recommitting to fighting for the living. I just wanted to get that out. It is the Day of Mourning today.

I have got a couple of statements I want to make around the strong-mayor powers. You mentioned a vetting process that you're going to use. You used a vetting process with Bob Gale, and how did that work out? That did not work out for Niagara, for sure.

You talk about housing, and we talk about housing a lot. I was talking to a builder yesterday. There are lots of houses in Niagara that are already ready for move-in. They can't sell them; they're not building. I said to him, "Why aren't you building?" He said, "We don't have a housing crisis; we have an affordability crisis. If we fix the affordability crisis then people can actually afford to buy houses." I think that was a really strong message coming from one of the Niagara builders.

I want to make a couple of statements. I think it's important that I make the statements because there isn't a lot of time to get to a lot of the questions there.

The other thing is you compared Niagara to Peel. I'm sorry, you can't compare Niagara to Peel on population. Niagara is a very unique area. Every area is different. Niagara-on-the-Lake is different from Niagara Falls. Fort Erie is different from Niagara Falls. Welland is different from St. Catharines. Thorold is different. They're all different; it's very unique. To compare Peel to Niagara in saying, "That's why we want strong-chair powers," just doesn't work.

I'm going to get to the questions. AMO has warned that municipalities are under real fiscal pressure because they're being forced to pay for services and infrastructure that should be the responsibility of the provincial government. My question to you, Minister, is: AMO is telling you municipalities are subsidizing billions of dollars in provincial responsibility. Why is your government focused on restructuring councils instead of stopping the downloading?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Thank you for the questions. Two things: First of all, we have increased funding to municipalities since we have been in government by 45%—not 4%, not 5%, by 45%—fact. With respect to affordability, the reduction of the HST, providing that rebate and the lowering of DCs so the \$8.8 billion we negotiated with the federal government is indeed helping affordability in Niagara, in Peel and throughout the province.

AMO is entitled to their opinions. I work closely with them; I respect them. But we are also ensuring that we get needed infrastructure put in the ground through these municipalities. I want to come back to—and I hope in Niagara that we will consider setting up an MSC there so we can invest in the critical infrastructure you need.

Respectfully, 126 politicians in Niagara has not been working effectively. We listened, we've acted and I think we're going to have a more streamlined, efficient government going forward on a regional basis.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I can appreciate that, but we have more food banks today than at any time in the history of the province of Ontario. We have more encampments than at any time in the history of Ontario. I believe the builders know what they're talking about. They say we've got an affordability crisis. You want to build houses? Fix your affordability so young families can buy their first home.

I'm going to stay on AMO. I respect AMO because they represent 444 municipalities in Ontario. Quite frankly, every one of your ministers, when they have their conference in Ottawa every year, you guys are there all the time—all the time. They obviously are a major voice in the province of Ontario.

Do you accept AMO's position that municipalities are paying for services that should be the provincial responsibility? It's very similar to that question; you do it quick, because I want to get through at least three or four questions.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Okay. Before I answer that, I'd have to find out what services you're talking about.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Okay. I'll go to this one—

**Hon. Rob Flack:** I can go through them, we can debate them, but I don't think that's what you want to do today.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I don't have time to debate with you. I want to make sure I get the point out.

How does supporting a regional chair with strong-mayor powers lower property taxes if the underlying costs are coming from provincial downloading?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** I'm sorry. Could you just repeat that again, please?

**MPP Wayne Gates:** How does appointing a regional chair with strong-mayor powers lower property taxes in Niagara?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** I don't think it particularly does. We're not putting this in place because it's a massive cost-saving process. Yes, in Niagara, you're going to see less costs, respecting the taxpayers' dollars, but we have not done a financial analysis on this in the sense that this is why we're justifying the bill. This is about effectiveness, speed, timely decisions so—

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I appreciate it. I'm going to grab my time back because I've got one more question.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** One minute left.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** So you're agreeing it doesn't lower taxes in Niagara. Minister, this bill does not—

**Hon. Rob Flack:** No, I didn't say that. I said that's not what we're focused on. It will lower taxes—

**MPP Wayne Gates:** It doesn't lower costs. You basically said it doesn't lower taxes, and it doesn't. In fairness to you, it doesn't.

Municipalities are saying they're being squeezed by provincial downloading: infrastructure costs, housing prices, homelessness, health care costs, property tax pressures. Your answer is to rush a bill through Queen's Park, cut elected representatives, appoint regional chairs with strong powers and keep the Seiling-Fenn report buried. How is that democracy, and why are you burying the Seiling-Fenn report away from the public if it's about democracy? We need that report released immediately.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Twenty seconds.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** That's not bad.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** I'll come back to one point where we will agree, in that I believe housing—the issue we have today is affordability. That's why we're putting Bill 17, 60, now 98 and the HST rebate along with the DC reduction program in place. Affordability is back on the menu.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you, Minister.

We'll now go on to the third party. MPP Blais.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Minister, I just want to make it clear: I was not suggesting you were home not doing work. I was suggesting you were in your constituency, as a good MPP, doing work in your constituency, as we all should be doing during constituency week and not being required to come to downtown Toronto.

Minister, at the beginning of committee, MPP Saunderson said that one of the reasons for the hasty nature of this meeting, the lack of time to seek delegates and, obviously, having this meeting during constituency week instead of while the House is sitting was to recognize the fact that registration for the municipal election begins on May 1. Of course, even with all this haste, this bill will not become law before May 1. You have another bill that affects elected councillors and mayors and municipalities that has reported back to the Legislature and has been sitting on third reading for over 200 days.

So I'm wondering why there is a difference between the haste needed for this bill because of the election and the lack of attentiveness or speed or haste as it relates to Bill 9 when both deal directly with elected officials in a municipal election where registration begins in three days or four days.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Right on. Again, with respect to why this particular bill needs to be dealt is because—let's take an example. If somebody who is currently a regional councillor in Niagara or in Simcoe—let's stick with Niagara—wants to run for another elected position, they should know that they have that opportunity. We want to get people ample time. Again, will it be passed by May 1? No, but we believe the signal is there and hopefully we can get this thing through after a good, solid debate.

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**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I appreciate ample time. That would suggest, then, that the government feels it was a mistake to change the Toronto election, only months before the election in 2018, taking time away from people to make decisions about which ward to run in or not.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** My answer to that would be: I have not heard one complaint about that since I have been minister and I think it has worked very effectively in Toronto.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Minister, earlier you said—and I don't want to put words in your mouth, so if I'm wrong please correct me—that the list of authorities for strong chairs, the subjects that they will have the ability to implement these powers on, are not yet articulated anywhere in writing. When they are, will that mandate be public so that all can see it and judge those decisions accordingly?

**Hon. Rob Flack:** If I could turn to maybe Laurie Miller or Stephen Lockwood, I believe—and I will get them to just clarify.

Number one, I believe the strong-chair powers will be similar to the strong-mayor powers. But, Stephen or Laurie, do you want to talk about that for a second, please?

**Ms. Laurie Miller:** Yes, Minister, that is correct. Stephen, feel free to supplement, but the proposed approach through regulation is that the strong-chair powers would be the same as those that exist for strong-mayor powers today.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** My question—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Can you just state your name for Hansard, please?

**Ms. Laurie Miller:** Oh, I'm sorry. It's Laurie Miller. I'm the assistant deputy minister at the local government division.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** My question remains the same, though. Will they be articulated in writing, specifically, so that someone can read them and someone can judge the chair's decision-making against them?

**Ms. Laurie Miller:** Those will be established in the regulation, which would be publicly available, yes.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** To what level of detail will the regulation extend?

**Ms. Laurie Miller:** The proposed content is included in the regulation that currently exists for the strong-mayor powers. There are no proposed changes.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Based on your experience working in the ministry, what types of issues do a regional council deal with that don't relate to the expressed subjects that the minister articulated earlier and that the strong power will relate to? Housing, infrastructure, economic development, and/or policing—what regional council decisions don't affect those areas?

**Ms. Laurie Miller:** I think the minister answered the question as comprehensively as possible. I can't think of anything to supplement at this time.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** The minister's answer was that he could not think of decisions that regional councils take that don't relate to housing, infrastructure, economic development or policing. So that's your view as well? There are no decisions outside those four that regional councils make?

**Ms. Laurie Miller:** There may be. I am not aware of any at this current moment in time.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Effectively then, if regional councils deal with decisions that relate to housing, infrastructure, economic development and policing, and those are the four areas which the strong powers will address, then the strong powers will address all issues brought before the regional council.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** One minute remaining—

**Hon. Rob Flack:** Go ahead.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** It's 60 seconds. That was me.

**Hon. Rob Flack:** I would say we will get back to you, MPP Blais. Again, I'm trying to understand from whence this is coming, but happy to chat in specifics.

Stephen, have you got anything to add to that?

**Mr. Stephen Lockwood:** I could just add, Minister—my name is Stephen Lockwood, I'm the legal director of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The regulation that's referred to is O. Reg. 580/22. It lists provincial priorities that apply to certain strong-mayor powers and that are intended to apply to certain strong-chair powers. Those provincial priorities articulated in the regulation are building new homes and constructing and maintaining infrastructure to support housing, including transit, roads, utility and servicing.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** And so is there something the regional council decides on that doesn't support housing?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** I'm afraid we're out of time, MPP Blais.

Thank you very much, all of the presenters today and Minister, for appearing and for the questions. We're now going to move on to the second set of presenters.

#### REGION OF PEEL

MS. SANDRA O'CONNOR

MR. FRANK DE LUCA

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** In the second set of presenters, we have two that are joining us virtually and one is in person. We're just still waiting on Frank De Luca to join us virtually.

We have here, from the region of Peel, Alvin Tedjo, chair, region of Peel government relations committee and councillor in ward 2, city of Mississauga; and Sandra O'Connor is on virtually.

So I will ask the chair to begin. You have up to seven minutes for your presentation. After we have heard from all the presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be for questions from members of the committee. The time for questions will be divided into two rounds of six and a half minutes for the government, official opposition and for the third party.

Welcome, and just state your name before you begin your presentation. You can go ahead.

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** Thank you, Chair and members of the committee. My name is Alvin Tedjo. I am a city and

regional councillor in the city of Mississauga and the region of Peel. I very much appreciate the discussion this morning and all of the positive references to the region of Peel. I'm very proud of our region.

I am here today on behalf of Peel regional council, in my capacity as chair of our government relations committee, to speak with you today regarding our concerns with Bill 100 and its implications for local government.

Peel region is the third-largest municipality in Canada. We have over 1.6 million people, of which 50% were born outside of Canada. We're also home to 200,000 businesses, and have the second-largest economic hub in the country. Our three local municipalities are Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon, and we have been working together for over 50 years. While we don't always agree, we have helped advance provincial priorities, such as growing and diversifying our economy, while making it much easier and faster to build more homes.

The government's objective of this bill is to improve the strategic alignment with provincial priorities to ensure more efficient, streamlined regional decision-making, and it proposes to do so by removing regional council's ability to appoint a chair and gives it to the minister.

At our meeting just five days ago, Peel regional council discussed this matter at length and passed a resolution that clearly states that the regional chair should be selected by, and accountable to, the members of regional council, ensuring direct oversight and responsiveness to local government priorities and community needs. Based on this resolution, I have formally written to the Premier and the Minister of Municipal Affairs to ask that they reconsider the changes that they are proposing within Bill 100, specifically the removal of Peel regional council's authority to appoint its own chair.

This isn't a matter of process alone, but a question of fundamental democratic principle, as well as effective regional governance and representation. This represents a significant shift in both how authority is exercised within our region and how local priorities are reflected in our leadership.

It's important to recognize that regional councillors are elected directly by the voters of Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon. These representatives are closest to the community, best placed to understand and respond to evolving needs and uniquely accountable to the decisions that they make. Removing the authority to select the regional chair will result in a distancing of decision-making from the very residents that we are all here to serve.

A governance model that weakens this local accountability by taking the appointment of the chair out of council's hands risks both undermining transparency and public trust. We believe that preserving council's authority over its own leadership strengthens the integrity of our regional government and enhances its effectiveness. Our council is deeply familiar with the local realities and challenges facing our communities, from rapid population growth to infrastructure investments, housing supply and the need for fiscal sustainability.

And in fact, we are very proud that over the last term of our council, we have led the way in the province on delivering provincial priorities. We have removed more development charges and fees and incentivized more new homes than any other municipality in the province. We have just one tenth of the provincial population, yet we are home to 25% of all new housing-enabling infrastructure, including pipes for water and waste water—something we are very proud of.

In short, we have been delivering on effective local government and provincial priorities. As we continue to drive forward regional and provincial priorities, it's critical that any reforms to our governance structure enhance, rather than diminish, democratic legitimacy. Our ask is clear: Affirm the principle that the regional chair should be selected by and accountable to the members of regional council by amending Bill 100 to remove the proposed appointment of regional chairs by the minister.

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We value our ongoing dialogue with the province, and we are committed to working collaboratively to ensure that regional governance reforms are balanced, locally responsive and firmly grounded in the principles of democratic accountability.

Thank you for your consideration of Peel region's views on this important matter.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you very much for your presentation.

We will now move on to Sandra O'Connor. You have up to seven minutes to make your presentation. You may begin when you're ready.

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** Thank you very much for this opportunity in the consultation process for the legislative committee on Bill 100, Better Regional Governance Act.

I want you to know that I'm not representing any organization. But for context, you should know that I have experience as a municipal councillor for the town of Niagara-on-the-Lake for over half a decade, so that is where I'm coming from. That's where my knowledge is coming from.

Today, I want to talk about democracy, government by the people—a form of government in which people elect representatives to make decisions. Let me start with a quote from former Prime Minister Diefenbaker: "I am a Canadian, a free Canadian, free to speak without fear ... free to stand for what I think is right, free to oppose what I believe wrong, free to choose those who shall govern my country."

Today, I'm choosing to stand for what I think is right, and that is having citizens have a say in determining the governance structure for our region, Niagara region, and the freedom to choose who shall govern our region: not have the chair appointed by the minister, but either elected from the regional council or from the citizens themselves.

You are proposing that we reduce the regional councillors in the Niagara region from 31 to 12. This is a significant loss of representation for our constituents and, hence, less democracy. Furthermore, you propose some sort of weighting vote for the 12, but we have no idea what that is going to look like. However, it will end up having the larger

municipalities outvote the smaller municipalities, and it will jeopardize the interests of the smaller rural communities. Niagara-on-the-Lake is a rural community. We're proud to be a rural community, and we do not want to be lost within decisions made by urban communities.

This bill is being reviewed by the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy. Niagara-on-the-Lake is steeped in cultural and natural heritage, the first capital of Upper Canada. In the War of 1812, the people from this area repelled the forces of the United States. We are a rural community, surrounded by the best growing area in Canada; lots of tender fruit and grapes are grown here. Because our voice would be lost at a regional level, protecting the uniqueness of Niagara-on-the-Lake will be more difficult. Protecting our heritage will be more difficult.

Perhaps the most undemocratic aspect of the bill from my perspective is the strong-chair powers. The minister-appointed chairs will have increased authority to pass policies and have the ability to veto or override decisions by democratically elected local officials and substitute their own judgment, even in opposition to the majority of elected representatives. People should have the right to choose the chair either directly or through their locally elected representatives, and this bill makes the chair an unelected member of council for eight regions in Ontario. The other regions can elect their chairs, thereby establishing two governance models for Ontario and making some regions more democratic than others, some more equal than others. This is not the spirit of democracy that this country knows and that people fought to maintain.

You've stated that the goal of the bill is to support more efficient and effective regional councils. I question, is it more efficient if citizens can't talk to their regional representatives because of reduction of numbers to 12? Is it more effective if smaller municipalities get outvoted by two larger municipalities and lose their voice?

It is stated that this bill is aimed at speeding up housing and infrastructure development by giving those appointed chairs strong-chair powers, similar to the existing strong-mayor powers. Since 2022, housing starts in Ontario have not increased, so strong-mayor powers have not helped this goal, and neither will strong-chair powers. Other mechanisms are needed to help achieve the government's goal, but that's not the point of this particular hearing, so I won't go into that.

Please reconsider the strong-chair powers and allow for full consultation with the people of Niagara on the regional governance change. Thank you for this opportunity.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you very much for your presentation.

We will now go to Frank De Luca, who I did see come on, for up to seven minutes for his presentation.

**Mr. Frank De Luca:** Thank you, Chair and members of the committee. My name is Frank De Luca. I was born, raised and schooled in Niagara. I still live and started my family in the best city in the world, Niagara Falls.

I am here today as member of the public who has been advocating for change. As a member of the public, I've advocated for change for regional governance for so, so

many years. I am here to voice my strong support for Bill 100, the Better Regional Governance Act.

For a long time, many of us in Niagara have felt that our regional government structure is not keeping up with the realities on the ground. I'm going to repeat that again: not keeping up with the realities on the ground. We see the pressures every day: young families priced out of the housing market, aging infrastructure that needs renewal, economic opportunities that move faster than our decision-making. We also see how slow, fragmented governance can hold us back in responding to those pressures.

Bill 100, in my view, is a necessary step—and I emphasize “a necessary step”—toward a more focused, accountable and effective regional government that actually delivers for the people in communities just like Niagara Falls.

Niagara regional council today is larger than the city of Toronto's, even though our population is a fraction of Toronto's. That fact shocks residents first when they hear it, but it matches what many of us have experienced: a council that is unwieldy, slow to act and often paralyzed by its own size.

When you have 30-plus people around the room, it becomes harder to set priorities, harder to move quickly, harder for residents to know who is exactly responsible for results. Meanwhile, important issues for Niagara Falls, from housing approvals to transportation to sewer infrastructure, wait in line while processes get in the way.

Bill 100 proposes to reduce Niagara regional council to 13 members: 12 local mayors and the regional chair. To me as a resident, that makes sense. It means every lower-tier municipality has a clear voice at the regional table through its mayor and it means the regional body can function more like a board of directors—focused, accountable and aligned. A smaller council is not about diminishing democracy; it's about making sure the representatives we do elect can actually make timely decisions that affect housing, infrastructure and services for over 450,000 people.

One of the key reasons I support this bill is because it squarely addresses the need to build homes faster and make better use of public dollars. This legislation is about strengthening regional governance so that local leaders can speed up decision-making, reduce costs and expedite housing and infrastructure projects.

In Niagara Falls, we see first-hand what happens when regional decisions take months, if not years, longer than they should. Projects stall, costs escalate and the residents lose faith that governments can deliver. A streamlined council working with a strong and empowered chair is more likely to get shovels in the ground and results on the ground.

This bill supports provincial-municipal alignment by allowing the minister to appoint regional chairs in regions like Niagara and to provide those chairs with strong-chair powers nearing strong-mayor powers.

From a taxpayer's perspective—I am one in several communities in Niagara—what matters to me is not who wins an internal political contest but whether a person in that role can take responsibility, set clear priorities and be held to account for outcomes.

## 1020

Strong-chair powers targeted to advance housing and infrastructure give that leader the tools they need to move forward on shared priorities. We need someone at the regional level who can say, “This is the plan. This is how we are aligning with provincial objectives and how we are going to deliver more homes and better infrastructure for Niagara.”

There is an understandable concern any time you talk about concentrating authority in one office, but this legislation, I believe, focuses the powers narrowly on housing and infrastructure, to build them within an existing democratic framework. The mayors of 12 municipalities will still be at the table. They will still represent the people who elected them, bringing local knowledge and accountability into regional decisions. What changes is that instead of a dysfunctional and sometimes directionless structure, there is a clear leader responsible for driving regional priorities and coordinating across municipalities.

Across Niagara specifically, this is a bill about unlocking potential that has been talked about for years but not fully realized. We are a region with enormous growth potential: a global tourism destination in Niagara Falls, rich agricultural lands, a strategic decision between the greater Toronto and Hamilton area and the US border, and communities that are ready to grow. Yet outdated and oversized governance structures have made it harder to move quickly on key priorities, from servicing land for housing to investing in critical infrastructure.

By bringing council size in line with the provincial average and strengthening leadership, Bill 100 creates the conditions for faster and coordinated decision-making across Niagara. As someone who has spent years attending public meetings, reading reports and trying to follow who is responsible for what, I can tell you that residents are not asking for more layers of process, and they're sure not asking for more politicians. They are asking for clear accountability.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** You have 50 seconds left.

**Mr. Frank De Luca:** Thank you.

The bill responds by reducing inefficiencies, clarifying roles and aligning regional structures and infrastructure, requiring regional solutions that are decisive and timely.

I also want to emphasize the urgency. We are living through a housing crisis. Young people in Niagara Falls are growing up here and increasingly unable to find affordable homes in their communities. We cannot afford a regional system that moves at the pace of the past with the demands of the present, and the expectations of the future require speed, coordination and focus. Bill 100 helps to ensure government is an enabler of solutions, not a barrier.

Finally, as a resident, I see this legislation as an opportunity to rebuild trust when people see their governments working together—province, region, local councils—to get homes built faster, to deliver infrastructure that actually keeps up with growth and to do it in a way that's transparent and accountable.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you very much for your presentation.

We'll now move to questions. We're going to start with the official opposition. MPP Burch, for your six-and-a-half-minute round.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** I want to thank all of the presenters for their thoughts this morning. It's much appreciated.

I want to start my questions with Councillor Tedjo from the region of Peel. Look, I want to ask you about the effect that constant instability has on a region. I don't think there's any region in Ontario that's endured the kind of provincial government interference and negative results from that that Peel has. You had the Hazel McCallion Act, which was not based on any kind of evidence. It was apparently a deathbed promise that the Premier made to a former mayor, which turned out to be a complete and total disaster. It resulted in the region losing hundreds of staff per week. It was going to cost well over a billion dollars. The government had to introduce legislation to reverse its own legislation. Now we have yet more interference in regional governance with these undemocratic moves.

As you mentioned, the actual numbers for Peel are quite good. You've done a really good job in addressing provincial priorities. The outcomes are really good compared to other municipalities. But you're constantly facing this headwind of provincial government interference. What effect does that have on the regional government's ability to operate?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** Thank you, MPP Burch, for the question. It's been a very difficult time for region of Peel staff over the last four years. We have lost a lot of staff, to your point, and there has been a lot of turmoil. Part of that has actually resulted in some services maybe not being where they should be, having lost a lot of qualified staff to other municipalities and the private sector.

I think one of the issues has been not having a clear direction in terms of where we want to go. I know we have had a number of different municipal affairs ministers over the last term, and that has changed direction a number of times.

I believe there are certain things that are going in the right direction. There are some downloading of services between roads, water, waste water, planning and waste, which will be a positive change for the region of Peel.

One of the biggest concerns we have in terms of how we can potentially contribute or meet the provincial priorities that have been set is how it affects our ability to plan and build the necessary infrastructure that enables housing. We right now have a deficit of \$1.3 billion that the province has said they will help us fill, because they have asked us to and we have responded by reducing development charges and fees to make it easier and more affordable for builders to build while at the same time building the necessary infrastructure to build. There is a significant gap there that we cannot take care of alone.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Great. Thank you.

You talked about fundamental democratic principles and the dangers of distancing the decision-making process from citizens. I thought I would give you an opportunity to expand on that a little more in terms of what you are hearing from not only citizens but also your fellow councillors in Peel, and the dangers of having a chair with

strong-chair powers, whatever that means. It sounds like they can just do whatever they want or whatever the provincial government tells them. What are the dangers of that from a democratic point of view?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** One of the things that I'm really proud of in terms of municipalities—and I know some you have been municipal councillors before—is how close to the people we are. We see them in our grocery stores. We see them when we go out for runs. We're very accessible; not that you're not, but we're much more accessible because we're there all the time and we work in the cities or the towns that we represent. That means that they have the ability to reach us and talk to us and raise their concerns on a daily basis.

When we have a chair that will then, in theory, represent all of us, represent the region and our views, and be able to veto through minority rule what the elected councillors are able to do, that does not feel democratic. People are not going to feel like that was a decision made on behalf of them. What is the different between a government and an administration? We elect governments. This is not an elected leader who can then run the region the way they want.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** What often happens—and this has happened in the United States in cities where there are strong mayors—is that the mayor will latch on to a small committee of people that—basically, with a third of council, the mayor and council can just run the entire show and it completely gets rid of any semblance of democracy. Are you and your fellow councillors concerned that something like that could happen within Peel council?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** I think it depends on who you ask. We do have strong mayors on our council as well and, certainly, they have used some of their strong-mayor powers to manage their local municipalities. But some of us, including myself, are certainly concerned about how that would be enacted.

To the point the minister was making earlier in terms of how this should be used only for housing-enabling types of policies, we've seen two examples of strong mayors already in Mayor Dilkens and Mayor Scarpitti where they vetoed their democratically elected council on housing-enabling and housing-enhancing types of policies.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** Ten seconds.

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** So there isn't a mechanism for the province itself to hold these mayors or a strong chair accountable to the very policies that they said they gave them these powers for in the first place.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** It can actually inhibit your ability for housing-enabling infrastructure.

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** Yes.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** Thank you so much. That was the time allocated.

Now to the Liberal Party. MPP Blais.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Thank you, Councillor Tedjo, for being here today. I appreciate your point of view.

Just before I begin, I'd like to point out that in Peel, it requires three cities coming together like a Constructicon

to exceed the population of the city of Ottawa—just for the record.

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*Laughter.*

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** That was supposed to be a joke but thank you for the laugh.

Councillor Tedjo, would you characterize this bill as strengthening local democracy?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** No, absolutely not.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** And obviously, you know people in Peel, you know people in Mississauga very well. Do you think they would believe that decisions made by an appointed, unelected chair who can override council with a simple one-third majority vote would be a degree of accountability or representative, necessarily, of their point of view?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** No, I don't believe they would.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** And so, can you remind us again what you think the most appropriate way forward for Peel is as it relates to regional government?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** Yes. I believe the most appropriate way is to do what we have done for 52 years, which is to have the democratically elected council elect a regional chair, select a regional chair, from either amongst itself or from a citizen at-large.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I presume you've been elected a number of times. Do you believe that a direct mandate from voters gives decisions you make a degree of legitimacy?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** Absolutely. I mean, the voters circle or pick a name on a ballot and they know that that person is accountable to them. Someone they don't know and have never elected is obviously more disconnected from that process.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Sure. Of course, Peel is very big, as you've pointed out, and largely urban, but there are some rural elements, I believe, on the outskirts. Do you share Sandra's point of view in terms of the discrepancy between urban and rural, with an appointed chair kind of perspective?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** Yes, we actually have a greater representation of members from Caledon specifically for that reason. Caledon, if we follow the ratio, should have one member. Instead, they have three. Geographically, Caledon is larger than the city of Toronto and it's larger than Mississauga and Brampton combined. And so, they have a number of issues that are important to address from a rural perspective.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Yes, certainly. The city of Ottawa has done the same thing. There are disproportionately larger numbers of rural councillors to address the fact that the areas are so large and so different from their urban neighbours. Thanks. I'm going to move on to Sandra, if that's okay.

Sandra, thank you for appearing today. I understand you are a councillor with Niagara-on-the-Lake, or you were a councillor in the past.

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** I am a sitting councillor.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Okay. So what's your view of having an unelected super mayor who can run the region with only one-third support?

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** I'm absolutely against it. I do not feel that it is in the best interests of democracy or the people in the region to have an unelected chair. And whether that means elected by the other regional councillors or they're elected directly, as along there's an election process, I feel that that is critical for the legitimacy of the decisions made at regional council.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** So a mandate from the people is important to ensure that decisions are legitimate, but are also seen to be legitimate by the population you serve?

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** And can you think of a situation where the regional chair might need to make a decision and use that superpower in such a way that residents might feel is illegitimate?

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** Well, I think that any of those citizens would feel decisions that are not backed by a majority of council are not legitimate because it is not in democracy's best interest or representing democracy if you have to override a majority of elected officials.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Given the change in the legislation as well, that we'll have a weighting to votes—that's not entirely unique in Ontario. There's weighting already in some of the conversation authorities—not that this government thinks conservation authorities work particularly effectively, so I'm not sure why they're duplicating the thing they criticize at these municipalities.

I did hear you mention the weighting, but I'm wondering if you could clarify your point of view on the weighted votes.

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** I think one of the problems is we don't know what that weighting is going to look like, so how can we support something that we have no idea what it's going to look like? I know that there's some discussion of representation by population but then you're going to lose the voice of rural people.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** One minute.

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** Perhaps there could be some weighting like is done in Ottawa, but at this point, it's the unknown, and I think that is the problem. There has been no consultation with the public or with the other councils on this.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Sure. Thinking from a regional point of view—not a very local, municipal point of view but the regional point of view—can you think of a decision that regions have to take that doesn't impact housing, infrastructure, economic development or public safety?

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** Okay. Well, public safety, that rules out the police. It rules out EMS, which are—normally, I would think those would be two areas I would look at.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** To help you out, basically, that is what the region deals with, is public safety, housing, infrastructure and economic development.

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** Yes, yes.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** So, effectively, all the decisions of the region resolve around those issues.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you very much. We're out of time for this round of questions.

We'll now go to the government side. MPP Anand.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Councillor Tedjo, it's nice to see you. We recently had a meeting in Mississauga with all the council. It's great to see the coordination and collaboration between different levels of government working together for a common goal to serve our residents.

I was looking at the data, and I was looking at, in the year 2000, there were less than one million people in the region of Peel. Today, we stand strong, 1.6 million, and we're not stopping. We're actually going to be between 2.3 million to 2.5 million in another 20 to 25 years. In your opinion, looking at the growth and looking at your experience—you've been in the region of Peel for a long period of time—what do you say has happened in the last 20 years, and what do you see in the next 20 years? What do you think about the growth, about the need? What is going to happen?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** I think Peel region is incredibly proud to be one of the fastest-growing regions in the country, and quite often we are the fastest-growing region in the country. We have had long-term investments. We currently have a \$20-billion infrastructure plan over the next 10 years to build housing-enabling infrastructure, from roads, pipes, for water and waste water so that we can continue to grow and continue to lead the way in Ontario and in Canada on growth.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you so much. When you reach out to the residents, talk to the residents, what are the typical issues they talk about with respect to the housing and the infrastructure? What is their opinion? What do you hear from them?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** One of the biggest concerns is around housing affordability. There was a result that came out recently that showed, among big cities in the world, Mississauga and Brampton were among the 20 worst, or least affordable, cities to purchase a home in. So what we need to do is we need to add more supply, and that requires a lot of work at the regional level and at the local level to ensure that we're building what we need to build so that homeowners can afford the homes that are going to be built and the supply increases.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Absolutely, and I agree with you. I do remember when I came and some of the first things we did was we wanted to have home ownership so that our kids can grow and have a good life in the neighbourhood, build that relationship.

Now you've been councillor for almost close to four years, and you have worked in a region where we have an appointed chair. My question to you, because we are making similar changes to some of the other regions, but you actually worked in a region where there was an appointed chair: Was there any issue with the appointed chair in the last four years that you had?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** No, and I'm glad you brought that up, MPP Anand, because the situation we were in at the beginning of the term is that we were understanding that the region of Peel was going to be dissolved. In that scenario, the province said, "We would like to appoint the chair," which is the same chair we had elected the previous term, to continue his term so as to not disrupt the dissolution of the region and to try and maintain as much balance as

possible in terms of staffing and priorities—basically, manage the ship as it was being dismantled. We did, in a ceremonial way, vote and unanimously support Nando being the chair moving forward.

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This isn't about him specifically; this is about this government, the next government, any other government in the future being able to supersede what is effectively one of the largest municipalities in the country. We would never accept the city of Toronto or the cities of Ottawa, Calgary or Montreal being appointed by the Prime Minister or being appointed by the Premier of that province. We would not accept that as a democratic value, that we would have these municipalities not be directly elected or selected by the council.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Another question that comes to my mind talking about the government priorities is something that we hear on the ground as well when we as MPPs go and meet these residents. It's also about the housing, about the infrastructure. They're worried about their children.

What's your opinion about government priorities in line with the regional priorities? Where do you see us as partners?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** Absolutely. The region of Peel, I think, has led the way. We have three region-of-Peel MPPs in this committee, and I think you've seen that we have led the way with our elected council—we selected Nando as our chair moving forward as well—and that we are able to meet the provincial mandate in terms of targeting housing and infrastructure, and we've exceeded it. A quarter of all new housing-enabling infrastructure—a quarter—in the entire province is being done and being built in the region of Peel. We're the example, and I think that's something that we're proud of but also something that we don't want to see disrupted by changing the governance model moving forward.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you so much.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** One minute left.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** One minute? Oh, my goodness.

Frank, I want to start by saying that we have a member who always talks about Niagara being the honeymoon capital of North America. On record, I've said many, many times I love Niagara region, considering we have Niagara Falls, one of the seven wonders of the world. God is so kind to us.

Considering what we have, what is your opinion? Niagara has so much to offer, but are you satisfied with the status quo? Do you think the development which is there is enough, or should there be more? What is your take on the next 10, 20 years?

**Mr. Frank De Luca:** This is a step in the right direction. We definitely need to look at everything in regard to the whole area as a whole, economic development. We're starting to do those types of things, but we have to do it as a team. We don't need 12 economic development departments. We don't need 12 of everything. We need a group of people who are going to come together, put the expertise together and make sure of it.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you very much. We're out of time for this round.

We'll now move to the official opposition. MPP Gates.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I'm going to just ask real quick to Peel: Are you elected, sir?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** Yes, I am elected.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Like myself. Do you oppose strong-chair powers?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** I do oppose them. Yes, sir.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Congratulations. So do I.

I want to go to Niagara-on-the-Lake and Sandra, who's from Niagara-on-the-Lake. I'm just curious: How important is this bill to Niagara? How many town halls have they held on Bill 100 in Niagara-on-the-Lake? Would you know that?

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** No consultation with the general public on this.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** So as a sitting city councillor, there has been absolutely no consultation on Bill 100, which is really going to affect Niagara-on-the-Lake, probably.

We're a small, rural community in Niagara-on-the-Lake, right?

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** Yes.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** The bill says it talks about heritage, infrastructure and culture. I think Niagara-on-the-Lake really has a lot of heritage, has a lot of culture. Because you skimmed through it in your presentation, maybe give a little more on what we really have in Niagara-on-the-Lake and why we're not Peel, by the way. We were compared to Peel by the minister. We're not Peel; we're Niagara and we're Niagara-on-the-Lake, and we are different.

Maybe enlighten the committee on some of the really nice things that we have in Niagara-on-the-Lake and why we feel that people should be elected.

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** Niagara-on-the-Lake is composed of five villages and surrounded by the rural community. This rural community has a specialty crop designation. It's all greenbelt, but the specialty crop is very important because it allows for more restrictive regulations to support our agricultural heritage.

In addition, we have a strong tourism presence—not as strong as Niagara Falls, but they come to Niagara-on-the-Lake for something different. They come there for the heritage, for the history, for the agriculture: the tender fruits, the grapes, the wineries. Tourism is extremely important to us, and we want to make sure that we are able to ensure that these items maintain an importance, going forth, in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Not to say that housing isn't important: We exceeded our growth targets that we were given, and we plan to exceed them in the future. We are doing this together; we are balancing the two.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Yeah, you did mention a lot of the really important things. Niagara Falls has their own 14 million visitors every year, but Niagara-on-the-Lake—and Fort Erie, by the way—3.2 million tourists come every year for all the things you said.

And we firmly believe that they should be elected. I think that's the big issue, here. It's not about power; it's about being elected.

When we look at the tax increases—municipal taxes—can you speak to the downloading that the province has done on infrastructure, housing and other issues that is putting an enormous stress on Niagara council and on the taxpayers in Niagara, because you are a taxpayer?

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** First of all, from the taxes that we collect, only about 25% goes to the town. We are working on a very small budget, and we are delivering as best we can, but the infrastructure needs to be updated because we have strong growth numbers here. We're almost going to double in size in the next 20 years, but we need to upgrade our stormwater management. We need to upgrade our delivery of waste water and water treatments.

There was just a development that came online, that we approved, but within the next six years, we are going need to upgrade eight different intersections in the Glendale area. That includes new roundabouts, doubling the roundabouts. Where is this money going to come from? It's quite critical, this downloading of responsibilities without any funding to help us.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Can you enlighten me, because I'm not sure—I know what the tax increases were in Niagara Falls, but what were the tax increases over the last couple of years in Niagara-on-the-Lake, a lot of them because of provincial downloading, especially around police?

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** Well, police is one big issue, because we find that Niagara-on-the-Lake, in comparison to other municipalities in the region, is double. We pay double the cost for police because of how these costs are determined. But with regards to taxes, the town itself has been within the 3% to 7% increase range over the last five years, whereas the region has a larger percentage increase. They're dealing with different infrastructure needs. They do the treatment plants and that so—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** One minute left.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** How much?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** One minute left.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Okay, I've only got one minute, Sandra. I want to ask you this question, because I think this is really the core here. This is about control. There's no doubt about that.

Why are you opposed to appointing a chair who then will have strong-chair powers, who can override elected mayors on the decision process because he only needs one third of the vote? Why are you opposed to that?

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** Because it goes against every principle of democracy that this country has. What my father fought for in wars and we're currently fighting for is to uphold our democracy. It goes totally against that. And our last appointed chair, unfortunately, didn't do very well in the consultation with the public on what he wanted to push ahead.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you very much. We'll now go to the third party. MPP Cerjanec.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Through you, Chair, thank you all for your presentations. I was listening intently upstairs.

Councillor Tedjo, just around Peel region, Mississauga and, I believe, the Peel police budget: The town of Caledon

also has a vote on the budget overall, at regional council. Is that correct?

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**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** Yes, sir, that is correct. The three regional councillors from Caledon do get to vote despite not being served by Peel Regional Police.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Does that make sense that a municipality that doesn't have Peel Regional Police is then voting on the police budget for Mississauga and for Brampton?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** No, and we've raised it every time redistribution comes up and whether or not they should be included during that process. But as of now, they are allowed to be part of that process.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I'm curious, I guess, whether it's in your opinion or maybe in your capacity as chair, that the province has been making some changes in Peel region around responsibilities and who does what. What's the region's position, and should it be going further given that the size of at least both Mississauga and Brampton are quite large now and can likely stand on their own in some ways? What would be the preferred approach?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** Speaking on behalf of regional council, the region's approach would be to have as little disruption as possible, to have a clear mandate as to what the province would like and would not like regional governance to do and then give us the ability and empower us to do that. I think that this government has seen that when given a challenge, Peel regional council has been able to step up and deliver on those priorities, notwithstanding the challenges we face during this transition.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Okay. Thank you.

Sandra, I really appreciate your presentation and perspective from Niagara-on-the-Lake. Do folks in Niagara-on-the-Lake have concerns that with this new model—and potentially still what might be hinted to down the road because we saw the disastrous approach of now, I guess, the former regional chair, Bob Gale, and frankly not being prepared, not understanding some of the specific issues with some of the councils. Do you feel that this could have a negative impact on the property taxpayers of Niagara-on-the-Lake and smaller municipalities?

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** Absolutely. If decisions aren't made that have the input of the people, which it wouldn't with an appointed chair, it certainly would impact the tax increases.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I've had the opportunity to speak to some folks in the wine sector there and grape growers. We've got fantastic agricultural land all throughout Niagara region, but really in Niagara-on-the-Lake and nearby, with wonderful wineries. Is there a potential scenario where you could see a regional council up the tax on some of those agricultural lands in order to fill whatever misguided priorities that the province might have in Niagara region?

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** Definitely, that could happen. That's an important economic engine driver. It's the wineries, it's the tourism that comes from it. It's really important that it be considered, and yes, it could impact it directly.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Thank you. I guess, in your perspective around the province's tourism plan for Niagara

region—I think we're awaiting to still see more details on exactly what that's going to be. But what do you think the focus of that plan is right now?

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** The tourism plan?

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Correct.

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** I'm not aware of the details of it, but from my perspective, it's to try and get more people into our region. But it could come at a cost for some areas, if you use the same rules for Niagara Falls as you do for the wineries and the agricultural areas.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Thank you. I think my perspective on it, as the Ontario Liberal critic around it, is that it is very much casino-focused within Niagara Falls. I know that within that part of Niagara, there are some major waste water infrastructure challenges. Frankly, just to even get down to Niagara now on the weekend to be able to spend a couple of days there, going on the QEW is a pain in the behind and the infrastructure isn't there. I know colleagues from the Niagara region who are here have said this to me and I hear it from folks in Niagara region.

Would this change at regional council really be able to fix what are, really, provincial priorities around transportation, the highways, the GO train?

**Ms. Sandra O'Connor:** No. I don't think it's going to help in that regard, but we must get more public transit down here and get those cars off the road. And I don't think the twinning of the Skyway is going to help with that.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** One minute remaining.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Thank you.

Through you, Chair: Frank, I appreciate your alternative perspective to the discussion today. What do you think the impact of these changes would be for these smaller municipalities in Niagara region, like Fort Erie, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham etc.?

**Mr. Frank De Luca:** Well, Niagara-on-the-Lake's participation at the region is still two members out of 30. I don't know what the way it would get, but it's not going to be any much more significant than that. I don't know if there is a system that is fair enough that it should be population driven. You understand that Niagara Falls is the largest budget, but it's also a significant part of the budget of the region.

But most importantly, it's an economic driver. I don't believe that Niagara-on-the-Lake is anywhere near an economic driver that Niagara Falls and the tourism industry—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you very much for your time.

We'll now move to the government side. MPP Sandhu.

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** Thank you to all the presenters for the presentations.

Councillor Tedjo, good to see you, my friend. You rightly mentioned in your remarks that Peel region is one of the largest-growing regions not only in Ontario, but I would say, in Canada. We all recognize, with that growth, the pressures it places on housing infrastructure services and timely decision-making.

How can we ensure that regional governments continue to operate efficiently to meet the needs of constituents across

key parts of Ontario in the face of unprecedented economic headwinds and ongoing housing issues?

**Mr. Alvin Tedjo:** Thank you, MPP Sandhu. Good seeing you, too.

I can't speak for other regions. I think you would have to ask them how to best deal with regional governance issues and how they can meet their provincial priorities as set out by the minister, because every region is unique. I think the region of Peel has always been under the impression, or has always tried to give the impression, that we are always going to be collaborative. We will always try to work together. We will always prefer to be partners in these efforts moving forward. And I think we have demonstrated that as leaders in the province in terms of how much infrastructure we've built and how much we've been able to support this provincial mandate.

But I guess one of the issues I need to raise as well is around mandate creep, and what is and is not within the jurisdiction of the municipality versus what the province sometimes likes to interject in. You know, I've often joked with the Premier when I see him that it feels like he comes up with municipal policy based on his commute into work. And whether it's bike lanes, or speeding, or red-light cameras, these—I would like to be clear—are the mandate of municipalities.

If the province is able to be clear, and this is the mandate that you have in terms of building housing-enabling infrastructure and approving more housing, give us that mandate. Let us deliver on that. Help us do that by providing the funds that are now created due to the gap in that, because we are lowering fees, while at the same time spending more money on building so that we can all meet the goals that we're looking to achieve.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** MPP Babikian, please.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** My question is to Mr. De Luca.

Frank, what are your views on how reforms to regional governance could better help councillors at the regional council table improve efficiency and deliver infrastructure projects?

**Mr. Frank De Luca:** I think I heard very clearly that Niagara-on-the-Lake requires some infrastructure—and who's going to pay for it? Well, if that's going to be a collaborative effort, it's not going to be for one community. If Niagara-on-the-Lake was to pay for their own infrastructure, it would be a significant cost. That cost has to be borne by everybody, and there are several areas when it comes to waste water infrastructure that are requirements. We require a significant investment, but that investment is not just for Niagara Falls; it's for all the other adjoining communities.

So, when we are going to invest in infrastructure, we are investing in a total area, not just for one city, or one village, or one town.

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**Mr. Aris Babikian:** A follow-up question: In what ways do you think a smaller council size can support more efficient decision-making?

**Mr. Frank De Luca:** On the regional side, you have a mayor who is directly responsible for the area he represents

and is elected to. Therefore, there is a one-person contact, not several-people contact and trying to figure out between region and municipalities.

So now you've streamlined the responsibility and accountability for all municipal people that all live in Niagara Falls and they're all also accountable to Niagara Falls. The mayor has now become a much more accountable individual because now the excuse cannot be—when it comes to regional increases, you can't say it's the region anymore because now it's one person and that person is now directly responsible for any of the increases at the Niagara region.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** How much time do we have?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Two minutes.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** How can regional governments best support timely housing and infrastructure developments to meet community needs during the current economic and growth pressure?

**Mr. Frank De Luca:** We have to band together as a region in order to—there are areas where there is a boom, and then there are areas that are not a boom. Those areas that are not a boom, those people that are in the planning departments and such need to get together with their counterparts in the other parts of the region and work together to work on the areas that we're booming at, and then, those areas, we can actually address the housing and infrastructure issues and then pull our expertise together, rather than have expertise all over the 12 different municipalities.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** How could reform of regional governments improve efficiency and reduce delays in delivering housing and infrastructure projects?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** One minute left.

**Mr. Frank De Luca:** Removing regional planning is exactly number one because that is where all the delays were. Talking about projects in general, there's where the delay is between regional planning. Now we can eliminate that function because it's not necessary. Now we have expertise in several different areas that we can now go from that.

On the other side of it, economic development—moving it to the regional level and monitoring at that level is actually where it should be, because it's just lines on the pavement. It's not physical structures that divide these communities. Therefore, we all have to get together as a region, a government, to actually get things done, get them done efficiently and start looking at savings and where we can pool our expertise, because that's what we're losing when we have them all in different communities.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you very much to this round of presenters. You may now be excused.

MR. KEN ROCHE

MR. SEAN O'MEARA

CANADIAN UNION OF PUBLIC  
EMPLOYEES

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** We will bring up the next set of presenters: Ken Roche is here online; Sean

O'Meara; and Yolanda McClean from the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

Those that are in the room, please come forward to the table. We have Ken online here. The presenters will just state their name before they begin, and they will have up to seven minutes for their presentations.

Maybe in the order that I started, if we could begin with Ken. When you're ready, you can go first, followed by Sean and then by Yolanda. Thank you so much.

Go ahead, Ken.

**Mr. Ken Roche:** Good morning and thank you very much, Madam Chair and other members of the committee. Thank you for holding these meetings. I realize it's your job, but I respect the effort that goes into taking municipal and provincial election positions seriously, and that's what I'm here to talk about.

I also want to thank people who have been in your position long before yourself and even myself. I'm 56 years old. I'm becoming more politically aware of things. Because of some recent changes with the provincial government, it seems to be more important at the regional level.

First, I want to thank people before us that allowed these remote meetings to occur. I'm totally blind and getting into Toronto from Cambridge is difficult for me, but somebody from North Bay, somebody from Thunder Bay, somebody from Windsor—there are other prohibitive measures: time and cost. So these things are important to hear from constituents across Ontario, and I certainly appreciate the opportunity to come and speak today.

I'm talking against the proposals to replace the elected position of regional chair with an appointed member. Some of the language I've seen in the act—I can't pretend to understand all of it, but it does seem that some of it is around the necessity or desirability. And “desirability”—that's specific language. It's going to strike out the word “necessity” in some of these acts and replace it with “necessary or desirable.”

The word “desirable” means it could be favourable, it could be beneficial, it could be for any given reason. If the public goes and asks the Premier or members of Parliament why they're doing what they're doing, with the most recent changes to the freedom of information act, that information may not become available.

We're starting to question what the government is doing with its majority. My concern with the majority, which I do respect—I have a background in doing some boards with the massage therapy association of Ontario; I am a massage therapist of 30 years. I believe I'm a therapist, and I think that gives me a well-rounded approach. I talk to people of all ages, experience, education and jobs. I've been doing that for 30 years, so I've got a well-rounded opinion.

When we are in a majority, which the PC government is right now, even as a majority, when we make decisions and we make these things law, they become law that can eventually become manipulated. Right now, they're assigned by the majority to protect the majority from the would-be minority that might harm the majority. As we've seen around the world, sometimes people can take a hold of those majority rules and then turn them to protect the minority

from the majority, so we really need to be careful of what rules we put into place.

Here in the Waterloo region, I don't know if the region is very beneficial, but I like it because we have Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo; we have different aspects, different geographics. We have a large farm area, we've got high-tech, we've got some agricultural, we've got some tourism. We've got all kinds of things, and the regional governance gives us a kind of collective identification and a brotherhood within a family.

I respect the elected position of regional chair. A lot of people have defended our freedom of expression, our freedom to vote, throughout wars and conflicts around the world. The members of the Canadian Armed Forces, of which my son was for five years, lay down their life if necessary to defend our freedoms, and one of our freedoms is the freedom to elect our officials.

There seems to be an overreach of governance when a government wants to appoint a lower level of government. This could be the province to the regions, but it could also be, later on, maybe the province to the mayors.

I don't even like the title of this act: “Better Regional Governance Act.” “Better” is a subjective term. Better for who? If it's an appointee, it's obviously going to be better for the people who appoint; the people that are connected to get what they want done—yes, more efficiently, more streamlined, to align the goals of the region with the province. That's not necessarily better. That's not better for the local communities.

Here in Cambridge, we've had some issues with Amazon, specifically, and other development here, that the city has said we don't want, the member here said we don't want, the constituents here said we don't want, or it's too big. The ministry zoning has overridden that and we're going to get it anyway. We spent \$400,000, I believe, on one project—to appeal that at the provincial level.

Now, it would've been streamlined and more aligned with the province if we didn't appeal it. We would've saved \$400,000, but we're going to get what we don't want. That's the difficulty with an appointee and overriding the administration—the elected officials of the council, the mayors and at the regional council level. This is what the community wants, and we may not get that, and this is what we don't want, and we might get that. That's the real concern.

Now, I can see this being a problem federally because a federal organization might say that they want to assign or they want to appoint Premiers. It would be the same type of thing. It would be more in line with federal goals; it would be more streamlined, more efficient. But there's a division in power, a division in authority, for a reason: It's to protect the people from the government.

Right now, the PC Party is a majority. I'm sure, in their heart of hearts, the PC members all believe they're doing the right thing for their constituents; otherwise, they wouldn't do what they do. I respect what you're doing. But in time, you may lose that power, and you may not be able to get it back if you make the laws such that it's so difficult to extend the timeline between elections and who gets elected. You may not be able to get that power back.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** One minute remaining.

**Mr. Ken Roche:** Thank you.

So this is not something for the current political party; this is something going forward. Poilievre, on the national level 12 to 14 years ago, had an opportunity to vote that if members cross the floor, they have to have a by-election. He chose to vote no. Now, they've swung from the CPC party over to the Liberal Party to help form a majority government that he would rather not have. I wonder how he would feel in this position if, in 16 years, this is going to go against your own party.

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Please take it seriously. This law is going forward. I certainly appreciate you listening to my opinion. Thank you.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you so much for your presentation.

We'll now move over to Sean O'Meara. Just state your name and you can begin.

**Mr. Sean O'Meara:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. My name is Sean O'Meara and I'm the ward 1 councillor for the town of Oakville and region of Halton. I've been a councillor for 12 years now. I just want to say that my comments reflect my own opinions and not those of the town or the region.

I want to thank the committee for allowing me the opportunity to speak here today. I'm here to express my opposition to the move from an elected regional chair to an appointed one.

Now, at its core, this issue is about something very simple: who gets to choose the leadership of our region. For decades, Halton has built a reputation as one of the most collaborative, effective and cohesive regions in Ontario. That didn't happen by accident. It happened because of a governance model rooted in accountability, where leadership is chosen directly by the people and where municipal partners work together with a shared mandate. Bill 100 risks undermining that foundation.

Let's be clear: Appointing a regional chair is not a modernization of governance; it's a step backwards. It introduces a very real perception and risk of patronage appointments and decisions made behind closed doors influenced by provincial priorities rather than local needs. That matters because when the residents in Halton go to the polls, they do so as both provincial voters and municipal voters. They expect that the people making decisions on growth, infrastructure, policing and services are accountable to them, not appointed through a process they have no role in.

Accountability is not a technical concept; it's the foundation of public trust. When a regional chair is elected, directly or alternatively through the elected representatives, there is a clear line of responsibility back to the people. When that position is appointed, that line becomes blurred. Once accountability is diluted, transparency inevitably follows.

We've heard concerns across Halton. This is not a partisan issue; it is a governance issue. Mayors across our region have all expressed opposition to this proposed change. The region of Halton unanimously passed a resolution oppos-

ing this change and, as of last night, so did the town of Oakville—unanimously.

The region of Halton has consistently maintained a AAA credit rating, supported significant growth as one of the fastest-growing communities in Canada, and provided high-quality, fiscally responsible programs and services. That should send a clear message. Halton's strength has always been its ability to collaborate across municipalities, across political perspectives and across communities. We do not have the dysfunction seen in some other jurisdictions. We don't have the gridlock or the breakdown. We have co-operation in Halton.

So the obvious question becomes, what problem is this legislation trying to solve? Because from where we sit in Halton, the system is working. When a system is working, you should be very cautious about fundamentally changing it.

I want to acknowledge the thoughtful concerns raised by my Oakville council colleague Cathy Duddeck, who highlighted the broader implications of this shift, particularly the erosion of democratic principles and the risk of distancing decision-making from the public. Those concerns resonate, because once you remove from the public the selection of leadership, you change the nature of that leadership. You move from representation to appointment, from accountability to alignment, from public trust to public skepticism. In today's environment, where trust in institutions is already under strain, that is not a direction we should be heading.

This is not about personalities. It's not about who holds the rule today or tomorrow. It's about the principle that leadership in Halton should be grounded in the confidence of the people we serve. If the province believes there is a better model, then let's have that conversation openly, transparently and with the involvement of municipalities and residents. By imposing the top-down appointment model without local support, it runs counter to the very idea of municipal governance. Halton has always been a leader in good governance. We should not be asked to accept a model that weakens it.

I would be opposing the appointment of the regional chair for Halton not because I oppose change, but because I believe any change must strengthen accountability, enhance transparency and reinforce the voice of our residents.

Thank you very much for your time.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you very much for your presentation.

We will now move on to the Canadian Union of Public Employees. Yolanda McClean, just state your name before you begin, then you can start.

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** Good morning. My name is Yolanda McClean. I am the secretary-treasurer of CUPE Ontario. CUPE Ontario is the provincial division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the largest union in Ontario and across Canada, representing over 290,000 public sector workers in communities across this province. Our largest sector is municipal, where there are more than 100,000 CUPE members who deliver the services that people rely on every single day. They maintain roads, operate

water and waste water systems, deliver social services, repair infrastructure, maintain parks, collect garbage and recycling and keep our communities running. Our members are front-line workers who make Ontario's municipalities function. So on behalf of my union, thank you for the opportunity to speak on Bill 100 today.

However, I do need to note that this one-day hearing appears to have been convened hastily. Our office was notified with less than 24 hours' notice. That raises concerns about whether this process is intended for meaningful consultation or simply to move this legislation forward with minimal scrutiny.

I am here today to speak primarily about schedule one of the bill, which proposes significant changes to upper-tier municipal governance.

Bill 100 would give the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing the power to appoint regional chairs in Durham, Halton, Muskoka, Niagara, Peel, Waterloo and York, as well as the warden of Simcoe county; grant these officials strong-chair powers, allowing them to override council decisions in areas tied to provincial priorities such as housing and infrastructure; and reduce the number of elected representatives on councils in Niagara region and Simcoe. Taken together, these changes represent a serious erosion of local democracy.

First, the bill replaces elected leadership with provincial appointments. It gives the minister the power to appoint, remove and reappoint regional chairs after each municipal election and to define their powers through regulation. This shifts authority away from local communities and into the hands of the provincial government.

Second, the bill allows for further provincial interference by enabling regulations that can control how municipal members vote, including the introduction of weighted voting, where some elected representatives may have more power than others.

Third, it reduces local representation by cutting the number of elected officials in Niagara and Simcoe, limiting the voices of residents at the decision-making table.

Regardless of which party is in power, regional chairs should be chosen democratically, either directly by voters or by elected council members. There should not be unelected appointees with enhanced powers over those who were elected.

The minister has said that the appointment process will be consistent and that individuals can apply to be vetted, but this raises a fundamental question: How can any government create a truly non-partisan process for political appointments, and how can Ontarians have confidence in that process without transparency and accountability?

Bill 100 risks entrenching a system of patronage that shifts power away from communities and towards the provincial government. We have already seen the risks of this approach. In Niagara region, a provincially appointed chair served only briefly before resigning under controversy. That situation highlights the lack of accountability in the appointment system and the potential consequences for public trust.

At the same time, decisions about regional governance are deeply connected to critical public services. In Niagara,

discussions around restructuring raise serious concerns about the future of public water, infrastructure and the risk of privatization. These are decisions that should be made by elected representatives who are accountable to the people, not by the elected appointees.

Regional governance structures should be determined by the communities themselves, not imposed by the province. For these reasons, CUPE Ontario recommends that Bill 100 be withdrawn in its entirety. At a minimum, we urge the government to respect existing provisions of the Municipal Act, 2001, which already allow municipalities to process and propose governance changes.

Reverse the reduction in elected representation in Niagara region and Simcoe county. Conduct meaningful public consultations in effected communities on any proposed changes to council structure. Consult directly with residents in Niagara on any proposal that could impact public ownership of water infrastructure.

Thank you for your time and I welcome your questions.

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**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you so much for all your presentations.

We are now going to start with the third party. MPP Blais.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Thank you, everyone, for being here. Thank you for the billboard of your graph, which you've given all of us directly.

For CUPE: Regional decisions affect services and therefore affect the workers who provide those services. So I'm wondering how important do you think that accountability around decision-making of that region is?

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** Well, I'm glad that you see our chart and I'm glad you have the paper in front of you. We say it all the time: public services, yes; privatization, no.

We've had an opportunity in Niagara recently to be in a few malls for a couple of weekends in a row, just talking to the residents there. When they hear "privatization"—it is a big word for some; some don't even understand what it means. But when we break it down to them and tell them—when we talk about water and that water is life, then they go into a moment of, "Okay, we need to hear more." I think that that's an important message that the residents are very aware of.

The privatization and the breaking up of the communities is not what the residents want. You see that 66% of the residents are in favour of having a vote so that they can actually make the decision about keeping all of the regions intact and also around keeping the water public.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Yes, I absolutely agree, in fact. I'm with the Liberal Party. Our advice to the minister was to have a referendum or a plebiscite in Niagara to decide the future governance situation in Niagara, so certainly I agree with you and your members on that point.

The government is not only going to appoint a regional chair, but that regional chair will be empowered with super-powers to basically make decisions with only one-third support of the regional councillor. One of the aspects of that decision-making authority is around the budget—if it mirrors the strong-mayor powers. Obviously, collective bargaining and how much employees are paid and the other

aspects of collective bargaining are an integral part of the budget.

So do you think that it's really fair or responsible that a political appointee can really affect the livelihood and the working conditions of however many hundreds or thousands of employees there might be in a region without popular support from the democratically elected council?

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** I do feel like the residents are asking for trust. And I believe that in order for them to trust someone, they have the right to elect somebody. If not the residents, then of course the council for sure because it will give them an opportunity to actually be vetted, be consistent, know that they have someone that has the best interest for them in their hearts. And, of course, it should not be unelected appointees with enhanced powers over those who are elected—and we truly believe that.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** The strong powers for mayors and for chairs are given in order to reflect provincial priorities, according to the minister. We know that during the lifespan of this government, some of their priorities have actually been to union bust and to actually make collective bargaining and other interactions with unions more difficult—or to actually take that away from unions with various legislative measures, of course. There were protests all over the province, three or four years ago, as relates to some of these measures.

So I'm wondering if a political hack appointed to a chair, with superpowers, representing the priorities of a government which have historically been to union bust and to take away collective bargaining rights and other rights that unions currently have—how do you think your members will feel about having that kind of indirect-direct line to the government to responsibility?

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** As I said before—regardless of whatever party is in power now or next time around—we still believe that it doesn't matter who it is, the regional chair should be chosen democratically. That is not a democratic process.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** But you're okay with the superpowers to override—having the chair, whether they're elected or not, be able to override the will or the balance of the democratically elected council?

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** I believe that once the residents have spoken and once they have the authority to do that, that they have someone that they can trust, I do believe that they would have chosen the right person.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Sure. This legislation has been compared to a ventriloquist and his dummy. The unelected hack is the dummy, and the ventriloquist is the minister or the Premier. I know that doesn't often fool the audience; it's amusing sometimes to the audience, but it doesn't really fool them normally.

Let's presume this legislation passes as is and goes forward. Would you expect then that your members or other people in the communities that you live in will hold the government directly accountable for the decisions made by their political hack appointment?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** You have 45 seconds to answer left.

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** Okay. Sorry. I have to think so fast now, as soon as you said 45 seconds.

I think that the folks of Ontario have the confidence that the process without transparency and accountability will affect them in a greater way, and I think that this will give them—I mean, of course, we want anything but for it to go through.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** People like to know who to blame or who to congratulate. If someone is unelected, it's hard to blame them, I guess. You have to blame the person who put them there, and the person who put them there will in fact be the Premier and not the people.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you very much.

Over to the government side—MPP Saunderson, to begin.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** I want to thank all of our presenters this afternoon.

Ms. McClean, I'm going to start with you because I appreciate your comments and your feedback. I come from Simcoe county. I serve Simcoe–Grey as my riding; the grey is in my hair. There's actually one municipality in Grey county.

I served on council for eight years there. In Simcoe county, the discussion about the composition of council goes back to the late 1990s. In fact, the changes that are in Bill 100 are at the request of the warden, Basil Clarke, who will be appearing here this afternoon.

Currently, Simcoe county has 32 council members—the mayor and deputy mayor of each municipality—and then the council has been electing the warden from amongst themselves. It hasn't been a democratically elected warden in the sense that the residents of Simcoe have voted for that. It's been what I would call a delegated authority.

In this new model that the county has asked for, they will have 16 municipal members—the mayors from each of the municipalities—and then a warden appointed from outside, because they felt having a warden that was one of the member municipalities would kind of skew the process. So they've asked for a warden that would be from outside of the 16 member municipalities.

My question to you is, when you indicated that there should be dialogue and discussion, I'm wondering what is your frame of reference for the Simcoe county comments there?

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** Well, the old model wasn't broken. The residents there had the opportunity to vote.

I just want to say, we come from the public service. We have five sectors, and Ontario only works because we do. I think it's really important for us to remember that those folks who will actually have the opportunity to elect, select, appoint and have the opportunity to do this work are the residents in the area who actually live, breathe, talk, walk, use the services that people need every day and will be able to represent them.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** It's interesting you should say that because, actually, as part of the constitutional mechanism for the proposed changes that the warden asked for, it has to get what they call a triple majority. The county council had to pass the initial request or proposal, and then it goes out to the lower-tier municipalities. All 16 local

councils voted on that. In the dialogue going into that vote, they heard from their residents. And the vote that took place from the local municipalities had to represent not just a majority of the municipalities but over 50% of the population, the residents of Simcoe county. In fact, the request that has been asked for by the warden was reviewed by each of the 16 local municipalities, representing over 50% of the population of Simcoe county.

So there has been plenty of dialogue there. I would suggest to you that, in fact, a proposal that's come to Queen's Park from the warden of the county by vote of council—and what's in the legislation—is in fact representative of the wishes of the majority of the residents of Simcoe county based on the local-tier votes. So I would take issue with you on that aspect, but I didn't know if you were aware of the fact that it was voted on by the local municipalities representing over 50% of the population.

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**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** No, I wasn't aware, but I do want to also say, you're not the only region. We've been talking to our own members and the residents in the area. You do have your folks who you say are in favour, and I will tell you that we have folks also that work in that region who are also not in favour.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Right. They come from the municipality—well, over 50% of the population, represented by the local mayors, did. Of course you're going to get disagreement on both sides, and that's one of the reasons we have these meetings, like today.

I just also wanted to ask you if you're aware of the percentage, then, of the regional governments that actually directly elect their warden. I'll repeat that: I'm wondering if you're aware of the percentage of regional governments where they actually directly elect their warden versus appoint by their council or some other level of government.

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** Sorry, I can't answer that one. I just don't have the—

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Okay. I'm told it's about 20%. We have two representatives here today, Mr. O'Meara and—sorry, Ken; I lost your last name.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Roche.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Mr. Roche—both in Waterloo and Halton. Are you Halton or Durham?

**Mr. Sean O'Meara:** Halton.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Halton, yes. Sorry about that.

So of the remaining 80%, it's about a 50-50 split about whether they're appointed by their local representatives or a provincial level of government. So it's delegated authority for 80% of the selections. I didn't know if you were aware of that.

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** Yes, that I do know.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Sixty seconds remaining.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Okay. So the delegation level, then, is really just a change of level of government. It's not really a change of a democratically elected—except for the exception of the three, as I mentioned.

I was also just wanting to get into the MSCs. I know we won't have a long time to discuss this, but it's your under-

standing that it's going to be privatized. I can tell you that, currently, all infrastructure, whether it be a road or a community centre or a piece of pipe in the ground, is all owned by the end user, the taxpayer. So what we're proposing through the MSC corporation is to change the liability or operation of it but not to change the ownership. It would remain publicly owned assets.

So moving forward, should the MSCs go forward—and we're doing this in Peel region and the regional government is already responsible for that level of infrastructure—it's just a change of control and liability.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you very much.

We'll now go over to the official opposition. MPP Burch.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Thank you to all the presenters for coming today.

I want to start with Councillor O'Meara. Thank you for coming. I really hear what you say about—because I've seen Halton's numbers, and they're doing quite a good job, actually. It's hard to argue with the fact that that regional municipality is getting things done financially in terms of creating conditions for more homes to be built.

This attitude that the government has to interfere with everything in order to get homes built I find really interesting. I wondered if you wanted to comment on this connection. It seems ridiculous even asking the question, but how does attacking local democracy—getting rid of local democracy—result in more homes being built? Because if that was actually the case, we wouldn't have a housing problem in Ontario, but we actually have the worst numbers in Canada.

The government's approach to housing is an abysmal failure by any measure, but in Halton, you're actually getting the job done. Can you comment on that?

**Mr. Sean O'Meara:** Sure, MPP Burch. Thanks. I might not take the bait on that last comment there, but if I thought appointing a regional government would change what is a generational market collapse in housing right now, then I would be all for it. I just don't understand that connection.

I have yet to see a circumstance where a single individual makes a better decision than a group of individuals who are working together. I think the key is collaboration. We've got a small municipality in the region of Halton—Halton Hills—and we all sort of paddle together and row together to make sure they've got the water connections they need. My ward is on the water. We've got some of the largest pipes running up through Oakville into Milton and Halton Hills, and we worked together on that, so I think there's a way forward to do it.

I specifically didn't mention some of the other portions of Bill 100, because there might be efficiencies to be had, and there might be some ways to go about doing that, but we work together. We work collaboratively, and I think the collaboration is key here. That includes working with the province, working with the federal government to get rowing in the same direction together here.

So when it comes to Halton, though—and that's not just for this government, for the next government, for the previous governments—there might be a time where the residents of Halton have something different to say than the

province. I think it's important to have leadership and a group around the table that stands up for that and says, "Hey, you need to get policy from the ground up sometimes too, and it can't always be from the top down." I would concur with you on that point.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Okay. Thanks very much.

I just want to ask some questions of CUPE. I know you've been in the field with a couple of polls lately and talking to people in malls and going around. It's really refreshing to hear that someone is interested in what the public has to say, because the government sure hasn't been interested very much. They're interested in what a few hand-picked politicians are pushing in Niagara, but you're actually out there talking to the public, which is great.

One poll was about forced amalgamation, and the results were something I could have told you 30 years ago: highly unpopular in Niagara. Nobody wants the government coming in and telling people what to do and how to force smaller municipalities to get swallowed up by larger ones.

The second one was about water privatization. There was an article by Angus Scott, the editor, recently in the Standard, and he was talking about all these reasons that the province is giving for regional governance reform. None of them really passed the smell test. But one of the things that the scare factor about forced amalgamation did is a bunch of the mayors got together and said that they would be in favour of municipal service corporations because they know that's what the government was pushing. He suggested in his editorial that maybe this was what the government was after all along.

I know that my colleague from Niagara Falls is going to talk more about the privatization issue, but there's an issue that he raised about the lack of democracy in controlling what happens with our infrastructure and lack of transparency. So I wonder if you want to talk about those two polls and what the citizens of Niagara have to say about them.

**Mr. Faiz Ahmed:** If it's okay with the Chair, can I take this question?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Just move the microphone closer. Just state your name before you begin.

**Mr. Faiz Ahmed:** My name is Faiz Ahmed. I'm staff at CUPE, government relations.

Thanks for the question, MPP Burch. I'll just give a minor correction to a term you've used and a term that MPP Saunderson has used as well. It's not a municipal services corporation; it's a water and waste water corporation. That's the name of the corporation. It's a brand-new entity. It is subsumed under the Ontario Business Corporations Act, meaning that it is not a public corporation. There's nothing making it a public corporation.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Sixty seconds remaining.

**Mr. Faiz Ahmed:** What it does entitle those water corporations to do is issue shares on public-private markets, on bond markets, to raise capital. It requires the corporation to be profitable. It requires the directors of the new corporation, who will be appointed by the minister's office, to be first and foremost responsible to the profit motive of that corporation, to the life and the health of the corpora-

tion, not of the utility. So I will just correct that point for the record.

On public polling, you are absolutely right. That's why we brought this novelty graph and we've put it in front of all of you, is because as soon as you mention the words "water corporation"—you don't even have to put the word "private" in there. As soon as you mention the words "water corporation," people's backs get up.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you very much. That's all the time in this round.

MPP Blais for the third party.

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**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I'm glad you talked about the water and sewer corporations. I remember in the city of Ottawa there's a municipally owned hydro company, Hydro Ottawa. They obviously are owned wholly by the city of Ottawa, but they were actually required to pay a dividend to the city of Ottawa. That dividend is stipulated by council resolution. And for a number of years now, Hydro Ottawa has had to borrow money in order to pay the municipality the dividend, which entirely doesn't make a whole lot of economic sense, as you can imagine.

Councillor O'Meara, I didn't get a chance to talk to you in the last round; I apologize. I believe I heard that you disagree with the appointed chair, but also the strong-chair powers. Am I correct in how I heard that?

**Mr. Sean O'Meara:** Yes. I would concur with that statement.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Why do you think endowing super-powers in a single person to override the elected will of elected councillors is a bad thing?

**Mr. Sean O'Meara:** As I'd mentioned in my statement, we're on a slope to less democracy and more concentration of authority and power. Anything that does that, I think, really takes away from what we're trying to do.

Let's remember, in the municipal elections, 30% of people came out and voted. And it doesn't really give a clear mandate with what the will of the people is. But I can tell you as a councillor, I get phone calls every single day and emails every single day from residents who did vote, didn't vote, and they ask you to carry a message back, whether it's property tax rates, whether it's building roads and transit or housing. Any time those comments are marginalized or side-stepped, I think it takes away from the will of the people.

Democracy is not just getting out and voting. It's taking part in it. It's about having your ideas and your thoughts expressed through your elected representatives.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Yes, I agree democracy is messy and sometimes watching the sauce just getting made isn't the greatest thing ever. We certainly have a challenge with election turnout or voter turnout in our municipal elections.

Do you think that basically telling people, "I can appoint a political hack to overrule your elected mayors who will sit on regional council for the big decisions around money, about infrastructure, about staffing and city services etc." will encourage more people to show up and vote in municipal elections?

**Mr. Sean O'Meara:** Well, MPP Blais, I wouldn't use the term that you used. I do think we all want good govern-

ance. We want efficiencies. We want expediency. But I do think what it does is it feeds the perception of a lack of accountability and transparency. And any time you do that our electorate is apt to throw their hands up and say, “I don’t know why I bother.” Anything you do to perpetuate that perception is probably not the best.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** So if there is a lack of accountability directly, or even a perceived lack of accountability, your expectation is fewer people would show up to vote?

**Mr. Sean O’Meara:** I’m probably not a stats guy enough to give you a proper response on that one. Sorry.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** No, that’s fair.

How eager would you be to sit on a regional council where you could spend a lot of time and effort into a decision, and then just be overruled by a political appointee?

**Mr. Sean O’Meara:** We’ve done big things at the region. I got elected in 2014 to build a bridge across the Bronte Creek. At the time, it was about \$85 million, and it’s now crawled up to about \$140 million to build this bridge. I remember sitting with our chair, Gary Carr, mayors and councillors around the table—there were about 21 at the time—and it wasn’t agreeable at the time by everyone. It took time talking, convincing, understanding, reading reports, and eventually that passed unanimously. I think that was the prime example of how you get to these decisions. That’s a great way of working together to get people to understand that we all give and take a little bit. It can be done and I just think we need to drive closer to that collaboration rather than further from it.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Yes. Politics is the art of the possible, right? It’s about what you can achieve working together to try to come to something that maybe is not perfect for everyone but works well.

**Mr. Sean O’Meara:** I would say in this country, you’re right.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** And I guess that’s the point. We’re trying to keep our country working like our country and maybe not looking like some other countries, where one or two people at the top get to make all the decisions. I’ll go back to CUPE if you don’t mind. Thank you very much.

I think a lot of people don’t necessarily pay as close attention to government, generally, or even how municipal government works, or the interaction between the union and the government. They want their garbage picked up; they want the water to come out of the faucet; they want the swimming instructor to be at the pool on Saturday morning etc.—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Fifty seconds left.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** So I’m wondering, if some of these changes go through, and I think that we can assume that they will, what do you think that might do to the motivation or just general happiness of your members in terms of delivering some of those really key critical services to the people in their communities?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thirty seconds.

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** I just want to go back to—it’s still not democratic; it’s still not what the residents are asking for. You just brought up, with the residents—we’ve seen them, we’ve heard them, and I want to be very, very

clear that they aren’t happy in their areas, and they don’t want what you’re proposing, so I just want to be very clear on that.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I just want to make it clear: I’m not proposing it—

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry—

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** The government is proposing it.

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** Because you asked me the question, I’m just—

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I am opposing it, vigorously.

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** I’m sorry, yes. That’s not what I meant.

I was directing to you, but—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** That’s okay.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** No problem; no problem.

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** I’m very, very sorry; yes.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you for that.

Over to the government side now: MPP Anand, please.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** First of all, I want to say thank you to each of the representatives for coming here and for their deputations as we are talking about this Better Regional Governance Act.

I’ll start with the councillor: Councillor Sean, I noticed that you’ve been working with the political office—you’ve been involved in the region for a long period of time. I just want to ask you a little bit about history. I’m from Mississauga; we’re from the region of Peel. If you look and compare the two different regions—yours and ours—especially in our city, we don’t even have any space left. We’re actually crying for space. I have one farm in my whole riding that’s owned by OMERS, not by a regional farmer. But you have such a vast piece of land, and you’re probably the future of our province as the major expansions are coming. I was looking at, for example, the increase in the population, the increase in the number of investments that are coming to the region and to our province of Ontario and looking at Halton, looking at Milton, looking at Oakville, looking at Burlington—you have lots of space, a lot of appetite for growth.

What do you think—what is your opinion—when you reach out to the residents, not just in Oakville, but in other regions as well within Halton—what are the people talking about? What are the pressing issues with respect to all the growth which—I wish it all comes to Mississauga, but we don’t have the space. It’s coming to your place. So what are the challenges that you have for this kind of growth coming to you?

**Mr. Sean O’Meara:** I would invite you to come to a planning and development meeting at the town of Oakville at any time because, almost to a person, they say, “Stop.” They are fed up, they’re frustrated, they can’t move. They’re living on top of each other. They feel that it is out of control. They’ve lost the town; they’ve lost what the town feel is. That’s a certain demographic; I’d say that’s the majority. If you talk to some of the younger people in our community, they’re desperate for a place to live.

I think there’s a pause that needs to be taken in what our best planning estimates are. I think last year was the first

time in our history that we had a decline in population. The numbers that we were planning to—that your government has put out in policy statements about our mandated growth and where we're going to go—I don't believe those numbers are going to be met. I think that there's probably time to take a breath and to look at, "What is the plan?" Everything can't fit in the GTA, and I think we continue to build on top of each other and I think there's a real sense of frustration there.

And, just for your edification, we're planned out. I know there are a lot of farms and grass, but that's all owned by people who have plans at some point to turn that into developments, and that planning has been ongoing since the late 1990s.

So we're struggling as well to find pitches for cricket, for soccer, for football, for community centres, for libraries, for schools. We build new schools and there are 41 portables on them the day they open. We don't have a lot of that room, so it's not all peaches and honey in Halton in terms of land and growth.

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But I will say there is room for it. There is infill room for growth that we need to focus on. I think that we need to listen to the people in the community about how we grow but grow responsibly.

I think when people in our region feel that it has been mandated and thrust upon them, that's where the frustration boils over a bit.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** In terms of the infrastructure, do you think you have adequate infrastructure for the housing or for the water that we need, or do we need to work on it?

**Mr. Sean O'Meara:** I absolutely would say you need to work on it. We have an allocation program which is unique in the province of Ontario. We make the developers pay beforehand and then they'll come in and we allocate where the water and waste water goes.

Last year, we got a report. We paid about \$23 million in unfunded growth-related charges to accommodate growth and that comes off the property tax base of every resident in Halton to accommodate that growth. That's growth that the developers aren't paying for; that's growth that our community residents are paying for to see that growth.

We would love water and waste water, the brush and flush. It's not the sexy stuff, but it's the stuff that you need. Any help that you guys could do in that sense would help us lift a heavy weight.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you so much.

That's it for me, Chair.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** MPP Sandhu, there's a minute and a half left.

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** Thank you to all the presenters for the presentations.

I'll direct my question to Councillor Sean O'Meara. Councillor, you touched on the water infrastructure investments. I would like to highlight that I am the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Infrastructure, and one thing I can tell you is that we're not leaving any stone unturned when it comes to investing in infrastructure, especially water infrastructure, because we've been hearing from the

municipalities across the province that water infrastructure is the number one enabler to build housing. That is why we are investing \$4 billion in municipal housing infrastructure, including various streams.

You also talked about the schools. We're building many schools, many in my riding of Brampton West as well and across the province, and you know where the Liberals and NDP stand on that. They shut down many schools—thousands of schools in the province.

My question to you is, how do you think a smaller council size can support more efficient decision-making?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** You have 35 seconds to reply.

**Mr. Sean O'Meara:** I will thank you for any infrastructure dollars that you can bring to our region. It is much appreciated. A reminder: Municipalities collect nine cents of every tax dollar, but municipalities in Canada own 60% of all the assets. Those things don't jibe all the time, but we appreciate anything that we can do.

I am an advocate of more functional councils, and I say that in terms of—there is a sweet spot in governance modelling and business school modelling, so—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank—I'm sorry.

**Mr. Sean O'Meara:** No, no problem.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** We're just out of time. Sorry about that.

But we're going to go over to the official opposition. MPP Gates.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Welcome, everybody, for being here today.

I'm going to start by saying to CUPE: Tell your members that although they might not be appreciated by the government, they are appreciated. They do incredible work every day, so I just want to make sure you take that back to them, particularly on the Day of Mourning. I wanted to get that thank you out.

I am going to ask you a question about water and waste water. Maybe you can elaborate on what they're saying and what really is going to happen here when it comes to water, because I remember Walkerton, where we lost seven people, who died from drinking water. That happened in long-term care too. We had people die because they dehydrated from not getting water. So we want it safe.

I drink out of the tap every day, because I know that the water in the Niagara region is good. It's got great quality and the workers take a lot of pride in making sure that water is safe for me to drink. And I drink a lot of water. That's all I'll say.

Can you elaborate on why CUPE understands the government's Water and Wastewater Public Corporations Act will lead to the privatization of publicly built and paid-for water infrastructure across Ontario? The government has repeatedly stated that the word "public" is in the title of the act and therefore claims this isn't about privatization. Can somebody answer that, please?

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** Thank you for the question. I actually want to read some remarks on that, because after Saunderson did ask about the word "public," I didn't get a chance to answer. Now I get a two-for-one deal.

The Water and Wastewater Public Corporations Act will lead to the privatization of water infrastructure that was built and paid for by the public across Ontario. The government says that it isn't about privatization because the word "public" is in the title, but the title of the law is misleading; the real issue is how the law works. Our major concern is that it gives more power to the minister and centralizes decision-making in the executive. The minister can create new water and waste water corporations and require them to be set up under the Business Corporations Act. That matters because these will not be traditional public utilities; they will be share-issuing for-profit companies.

Once you create companies like this, their purpose changes. The government of these corporations is legally required to act in the best interests of the corporation. That means that their decisions must support business goals like making money and generating returns. In practice, every decision they make has to be justified as a legitimate business purpose, meaning it supports profitability. That puts profit at the centre, and when profit comes first, other priorities, including ours, come second, like service quality, public health, fairness, working conditions and protecting the environment.

It also doesn't matter who owns the shares today. Once shares exist, they can be sold, transferred or traded. Ownership can change just over time. That is how privatization happens.

So that's when you asked me the question about "public" and it's not privatization—it absolutely is. It isn't just a concern; it's the conclusion of independent legal analysis by third-party lawyers. It is also why CUPE Ontario and others have been raising the alarm since this model was first introduced in Bill 60 in October of 2025.

The government is relying on the title of the act to downplay what this law actually does, but creating a for-profit, share-based water corporation has a clear outcome.

We will have more to say about this, of course, when we are here next week on Bill 98 to discuss it with you.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I really appreciate that answer, because I have a lot of concerns with it as well.

Does CUPE believe that strong-chair powers should be removed from Bill 100 entirely, like I do? It's from you guys.

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** A hundred per cent.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Want me to repeat it?

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** I said 100%.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** A hundred per cent?

**Ms. Yolanda McClean:** That was an easy question.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** All these questions are easy. Quite frankly, I wrote down last night while I was watching hockey at 2 in the morning in overtime: "Give CUPE easy questions." That's what I wrote down, just for the record.

I have other questions for CUPE, but you know what? I am absolutely impressed with your presentation. You know what you're doing. I was a city councillor in Niagara Falls. As a matter of fact, I lost seven times before I got elected. And the reason why I say that is that's democracy. I picked myself back up and ran again. This government just wants to appoint people.

I'm very, very impressed with what you're saying, your knowledge. So I'm going to go out on a limb, and I want you to reply to this: I believe Bill 100 is nothing more than about power, it's about control and it's about making sure that there isn't any consultation. As you know, this was put together in 24 hours. If it was that important, they would have talked to CUPE. They would have talked to my municipality—because I represent Fort Erie, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Falls—no consultation.

Do you believe that that is kind of where we're heading here when you start appointing people, especially giving them strong-chair powers? That's even another step further.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Fifty-five seconds to answer.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Fifty-five seconds, buddy. Go to it.

**Mr. Sean O'Meara:** MPP Gates, I firmly believe that you believe that entirely.

Listen, I said in my statement what the comments were with regard to accountability and transparency. I appreciate a need to do something now. Like I said, we're in a generational collapse of housing, and what we aspired to do has changed. Our housing numbers have changed. So I understand the impetus to do something quickly, but you're right: I do believe there's a way to do that in a way that underpins what our democratic values are that make us different from a lot of countries in this world right now that are on a slide in the opposite way. We have to guard that. We have to protect that with every decision that we make and every person we talk to and every delegation we have. I firmly believe that to be a fundamental value of this country, this province and these municipalities that we're so honoured to represent.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you very much. We're out of time, but I thank everyone for their presentation.

This committee stands in recess until 1 p.m. this afternoon, when we will resume public hearings on Bill 100. Thank you.

*The committee recessed from 1200 to 1301.*

MR. TONY JOOSSE

MR. RORY NISAN

REGION OF DURHAM

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Good afternoon, everyone. I call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy to order. We're meeting to resume public hearings on Bill 100, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Municipal Elections Act, 1996.

To ensure that everyone who speaks is heard and understood, it is important that all participants speak slowly and clearly and by the microphone, if you could. Please wait until you're recognized by the Chair before speaking, and as always, all comments should go through the Chair.

As a reminder, each presenter will have seven minutes for their presentation. After we have heard from all the presenters, the remaining 39 minutes of the time slot will be for questions from members of the committee. The time for questions will be divided into two rounds of six and a half

minutes for the government members, two rounds of six and a half minutes for the official opposition and two rounds of six and a half minutes for the third party.

I will now call on the 1 o'clock rounds: Tony Joesse, Rory Nisan. Tony is on the screen, and also online, we have the region of Durham—I believe Elizabeth Roy and Elaine Baxter-Trahair.

So I think we're all here. I will begin as read out.

Tony, you have up to seven minutes. Just state your name before you begin, please.

**Mr. Tony Joesse:** Tony Joesse. Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee and everyone joining us today.

I'm Tony Joesse, from Grimsby, Ontario. I've spent my career in business leadership, and I've also had the privilege of serving as a municipal councillor back in the 1980s and 1990s for the great town of Grimsby.

I'm here today in strong support of the Bill 100, because Niagara needs a governance model built for the future and not one stuck in the past. I've worked in both private and public sectors, and I can tell you this plainly: Results come when leadership is clear, accountability is direct and decisions are made in a timely way. When structures become too large, too slow and too complicated, progress stalls.

That is where Niagara has found itself too often. We are a region with enormous strengths. We have world-class agriculture, growing tourism, strategic access to the GTA and the US markets, strong communities and tremendous potential for investment. But potential means nothing if government cannot move. Too often, businesses, institutions and residents see delay, duplication and confusion over who is responsible for getting things done. That hurts confidence, it hurts investments and it hurts our ability to compete.

Bill 100 is a practical response to that challenge. A regional council made up of 12 local mayors and a regional chair creates something Niagara needs badly: It creates clarity. It means the people sitting at that table are already directly elected leaders, accountable every day to their communities. It means decisions can be made faster, responsibilities are clearer and residents know exactly who to hold accountable. That's good governance.

From a business perspective, predictability matters. Investors want to know approvals won't drag on. Employers want infrastructure decisions made on time. Developers want certainty. Major institutions want partners who can act. Right now, Niagara does not always send that message.

I was closely involved in helping advance the new West Lincoln Memorial Hospital project. That experience showed me what happens when partners align, leadership is focused and decisions are clear: projects move. That hospital required co-operation between the municipalities, the region, the province and health care leaders. It required urgency, it required accountability, and it required people willing to make decisions. And it is the fastest-built hospital in Ontario's history.

We need more of that in Niagara, not less. Bill 100 helps create the environment where more major projects can succeed, whether it's housing, roads, water infrastructure, transit or economic development.

Some will say fewer people around the table means fewer voices. I disagree. Every mayor on that council is elected by their residents. They know their communities, they hear concerns directly, and they are accountable at election time. This bill does not silence local voices; in fact, it strengthens them by putting decision-makers directly at the table.

Let me be clear: This is not about criticizing the current councillors. Many have served many years with dedication. The problem is not the people; the problem is the structure. Even talented people struggle in systems that are oversized and inefficient. Niagara is competing with other regions for investments, jobs, housing dollars and provincial attention. We cannot afford to be slower, more divided or less decisive than our competitors. We need a regional government that can act.

Bill 100 is about modernization. It is about accountability. It is about making sure governance helps growth instead of hindering it. As someone who has spent a lifetime in business and public service, I know strong organizations can adapt when the old model no longer works. This is what this legislation does. Niagara's best days are ahead of us only if we are willing to modernize how we govern ourselves.

I urge this committee to support Bill 100. Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you, Tony.

We'll go to the other two presenters, and then the questions will be at the end.

I now call on Rory Nisan to go ahead, please.

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** Thank you very much, committee members, for having me today. Yes, my name is Rory Nisan, and I am a city and regional councillor for ward 3 at the city of Burlington and region of Halton.

I am speaking in my personal capacity to oppose the key provisions of Bill 100. I am going to focus my comments on two changes with serious negative impacts on Halton region, as well as the municipalities of Burlington, Halton Hills, Milton and Oakville. I am, of course, referring to the provision to make the Halton regional chair appointed by the minister and to give that role strong-chair powers.

The chair role in Halton has been elected for 26 years after a decision by Halton regional council. I want to be extremely clear with all of you: Halton region is a high-functioning government with a AAA credit rating, consistently rated as a top employer, delivering a tax rate pegged to inflation. We always balance our budget, of course.

Our council members are full-time, servicing large wards like my own, which will have around 35,000 people after the next election. We manage growth I believe in an exemplary way, as demonstrated by massive greenfield communities sprouting up in all of our municipalities. We are one of the fastest-growing regions in the country, and we're ready to assist the provincial government in achieving its housing goals even if they are slipping through our fingers.

I would say all of that is under threat by Bill 100. Running the region is a complicated business. We do operate like a board of directors: We seek consensus as much as possible. We make tough decisions. Every four years, our residents

help us add new members, while those with more experience at the table are the institutional memory.

The regional chair is elected by 600,000 strong constituents, ensuring local accountability for local decision-making. Changing that role to being appointed by the province risks having a regional chair who has no mandate from the residents. Instead, their mandate would arise from the provincial government. The new regional chair risks having little knowledge of good governance at the local level. Instead, they will be governed through the province. The new regional chair will lack the relationships and authority to get the job done. Instead, they will have to rely on raw power. Local decisions should be made by people elected locally by their residents. That's accountability.

All those inherent issues will be compounded by a severe error of giving these chairs added powers, the so-called strong-chair powers. These powers will lead to potential control of the entire regional government through the ability to hire and fire senior staff and the chief administrative officer, as well as the ability to rule with minority support and to overrule decisions not deemed in the provincial interest. We've seen this play out in Halton region, as well as in our lower-tier municipalities in particular.

#### 1310

I've watched first-hand as Burlington city council went from relative unanimity to extreme divisiveness around these strong-mayor powers. When you can overrule decisions to promote a provincial interest, you become more of an arm of the provincial priorities.

The concept that decisions are debated and made in public is discarded when a mayor can make decisions with less than half of council in support, allowing them de facto control of decision-making by potentially—and this is entirely plausible—caucusing in secret with less than a majority of council. That is now possible. It's the same risk with the regional strong-chair powers. Not to mention, of course, the destruction of the most fundamental principle of our democracy, which is majority rule.

I sit on a lot of boards. I chair one. There is a reason that corporations have boards of directors: CEOs need to be accountable to group decision-making. It's the same reason we have Legislatures, not just Premiers. That principle should never be messed with. And yes, boards of directors have chairs, but majority rule wins the day on a board of directors.

I ask: What would you think if the Premier was appointed by the Prime Minister? What would it be like if your Legislature no longer required majority rule, but just the support of, say, the leader of the government plus one third? If, for example, you are a government backbencher, imagine your vote not mattering.

Just because you can, doesn't mean you should. There are better options. If you want to change local democracy, you can make it subject to a local referendum. Local councils have the power to have local referenda. We can put the question to the people and have faith in the people to determine their own democracy. It wasn't that many years ago that we had multiple rounds of consultation on local governance.

A report was written but never published. As far as I know, an appointed chair with special powers never came up, so I think we need to root this back into the will of the people of Ontario.

Second, though being elected by residents is absolutely the best way to do it, you can also have the role elected by its membership, so a regional council elects its chair. I don't think that's ideal, but a reasonable compromise where local decision-making authority is preserved. And there are different reasons, regions have long had different ways of doing it, and you know what? That's perfectly fine because they do it with a mandate from their residents.

Finally, as fellow elected officials, I know you often ask yourself this question: What is the problem we're trying to solve? Here we have heard that there are too many politicians in some regions. Sure, but what is exactly too much? What rigour has been brought to that discussion? Shouldn't small towns maybe have their own representatives, particularly if their own residents want that representation? I find it surprising because people in rural communities want their voices heard more, not less.

In terms of Halton region, I cannot figure out what problem we are trying to solve—I just can't. The residents are happy to elect their chair. Not a single person has said, "We need to give the chair enhanced powers." So to have an unaccountable, unelected, strong leader of a democratic body is something we should all be against.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thirty seconds remain.

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** Perfect. Thank you, Chair.

This bill will divide councils. It will undermine local governance. It will do nothing—I underline this—nothing for housing, and further concentrate power in the province.

Chair, I think it's an unfortunate shame that the greatest flaw of democracy is that it's capable of destroying itself. Thank you very much.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you for your presentation.

We will now turn to the region of Durham. Just state your names before you begin, and you can go ahead.

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am Elizabeth Roy, the mayor of the town of Whitby, and I'm joined here with our CAO from the region of Durham, Elaine Baxter-Trahair. I'm here on behalf of regional chair John Henry, who is unable to be here today.

I'm going to be candid. We are disappointed by what we are seeing and hearing in Bill 100, particularly as it relates to regional governance and the future of Durham region. As members of Durham regional council, we have worked hard to maintain a constructive, collaborative relationship with the province and to support and advance provincial priorities. But true collaboration requires honesty, and it's important to speak clearly when proposed changes raise fundamental concerns about accountability and public confidence.

Durham residents were clear about how they want their regional leadership selected. In 2010, we did have a referendum, and nearly 80% of the voters supported a directly elected regional chair—a model that has provided strong

democratic legitimacy and clear accountability across the entire region.

Local councillors are elected to represent their own communities, but when they sit at the regional table, they also have the responsibility to think and act from a regional perspective. We have to think about how regional services—whether transit, housing, public health, paramedics or long-term care—are planned, funded and delivered across municipal boundaries.

Regions are the service manager for homelessness and child care on behalf of the province. These services only work well when decisions are made with the whole region in mind and when efficiencies of scale can be achieved. The strongest regional leadership reflects that reality—someone who understand the full scope of the 2,500-square-kilometre region; who has spent time in urban neighbourhoods, rural communities and lakeshore municipalities; and who has a first-hand understanding of residents' priorities, from one end of Durham to the other.

The region-wide perspective is essential to making fair, balanced and long-term decisions. Bill 100 proposes to move away from this approach by allowing the province to directly appoint the regional chair. This is not a minor administrative change. It fundamentally alters the relationship between residents, council and regional leadership. An appointed chair, particularly one selected by the province rather than one chosen locally, raises real concerns about transparency, accountability and decision-making perceived to occur behind closed doors, especially at a time when trust in public institutions is already fragile.

Bill 100 grants these appointed chairs strong-chair powers, similar to strong-mayor authorities. At the regional level, these include proposing the budget, appointing or dismissing the CAO and senior staff, vetoing certain bylaws, and advancing matters tied to provincial priorities.

These are significant powers. Concentrating this level of authority in a single unelected individual fundamentally shifts the balance of governance at the regional table. While elected mayors and councillors would still sit on the council, the chair, armed with extraordinary executive authority, would not be directly accountable to the residents of the region.

This stands in contrast to how strong-mayor powers have been treated elsewhere. Last year within the Durham region, the township of Brock experienced a vacancy in the mayor's office shortly after being designated a strong-mayor municipality. When the Municipal Act was amended with the introduction of strong-mayor powers, councils were explicitly removed from the process of appointing a replacement. If a vacancy occurs for the office of a strong mayor, a by-election is required. The reasoning was clear: These powers are too significant to confer by council. They must be granted directly by voters. It stands to reason that if the powers are to be given to the upper-tier heads of council, they too must be elected by the people and not appointed.

Bill 100 will also have a direct impact on population and taxation. The six GTHA regional municipalities together serve approximately 5.6 million people—about one third of Ontario's population. In two-tier systems, upper-

tier property taxes typically account for 40% to 50% of the property tax bill. Taken together, this means that the province would assume direct control through an appointed chair's over-governance structures, responsible for roughly 15% to 20% of all property tax dollars raised in Ontario, despite those revenues funding local and regional services. That is a significant shift, and it warrants meaningful local input.

I want to be clear: This is not about resisting change. We continue to demonstrate the adaptability and commitment to support growth. Durham's two-tiered governance model reflects the diversity of our urban, suburban and rural communities while supporting coordinated regional decision-making. Through this structure, we deliver services efficiently, avoid duplication and share costs across a large and growing geography. We also work together with other regions to coordinate shared infrastructure and human services delivery.

Our record speaks for itself. With an elected chair and council, Durham has delivered major infrastructure, maintained fiscal discipline and built strong working relationships with the province. Governance stability has supported long-term planning and tangible results for the residents. At the same time, our CAO is leading a core services review at this present time to ensure we are making the appropriate investments. We are willing partners to continuous improvement.

#### 1320

But governance solutions cannot be one-size-fits-all. Durham's context is unique and decisions must reflect that reality. So we're respectfully asking the province to return to the directly elected regional chairs in Durham. If the province is determined to proceed with the changes under Bill 100, then the minimum existing regional councillors must be meaningfully consulted on how the regional chair is selected.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Forty-five seconds left.

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** Yes—last sentence: When change is being considered, councils as the elected representatives of residents must have a clear and meaningful role in shaping what's next.

I thank you for this time and opportunity, Madam Chair.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you so much for your presentations.

We will now go to the questions portion. I'm going to start with the government side. MPP Anand, do you want to start off? Thank you.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you to all the members who are here. I'm going to be talking to Tony and to the councillor. Thank you for coming.

Tony, to start with you: It's nice to see you. We have met in the past in Niagara Falls. And I'm saying on record I love Niagara Falls. I've said it multiple times. I truly believe that Niagara Falls is underdeveloped, underserved right now and has a lot of potential. We need to work together collaboratively, because anything for Niagara is for Ontario, and anything for Ontario is for Canada.

So what is your opinion: What will this bill do in terms of development in Niagara Falls?

**Mr. Tony Joose:** Thanks for the question, and thanks for your always positive comments with regard to Niagara.

I feel we're just on the cusp of a lot of great big things. But one of the roadblocks is the current governance model. I mean, as a business guy—and I can give you examples: seven site plans since 2019 and no approvals on land that was already zoned, and the hindrance for business to get things done. If you live in Grimsby, on the escarpment side of the property, if somebody wants to put a 2,000-square-foot garage on a five-acre parcel, you have the conservation authority, you have the Niagara region, the Niagara Escarpment Commission and the town of Grimsby. It takes two and a half years and \$15,000 to \$35,000 in consulting and engineering fees to get it across the finish line—if you can get it across the finish line in four to five years. And I'm talking a 2,000-square-foot garage on property you've owned for 40 years and didn't require a zoning change.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you so much.

To the councillor: Councillor, it's nice to see you. Something which we feel jealous with Halton region is that you have a lot of land. You're right next to the action—401, 407, 413—and there are a lot of things that are happening in the Halton region.

My question is simple. When I reach out to many of the residents who are in Mississauga—Malton, some of the leap-frog effects—when they're looking for a next house, they're looking to expand their business, they actually look at you guys, who are well within the commute of Toronto, well within the commute of Mississauga, Peel region.

So what is your take on—do we need more services in the region, whether it is housing, whether it is water infrastructure? What do you see and how do you see your region in the next 10 to 15 years?

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** Yes, thank you very much. Great question.

Halton region is growing very quickly in all of our municipalities. You see these greenfield developments. We've got the tall buildings. We've got it all. We have zero problems servicing any of that development, whether it's through our hydro companies or whether it's the water and the waste water. We use an allocation program to collect the development charges, and we guarantee we will get it done on time.

So we don't have a problem in Halton region when it comes to servicing the growth, and that's why we're growing so quickly. That's what we don't want to see minimized. We don't want to see it infringed upon and we'd be happy to set up a meeting with the province to show you how we've done it. Working together, I think this way of getting housing built is certainly replicable. Thank you for the question.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you so much. That's what I feel. We are at a state of time when we see a lot of investments coming to Ontario and many of those investments are growing out of Peel region, going to other areas. Collaboration is the key. I just want to say thank you for all your service that you're doing for the people of Peel region. Thank you so much.

Chair, that's it for me. MPP Grewal, I think.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** MPP Grewal, you have two minutes.

**Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:** Welcome, everyone. Thank you for being here today to provide your remarks on Bill 100. Great to see you all.

My question is for Councillor Tony Joose—former councillor. I wanted to kind of have a little bit of your insight based on your experience with the town of Grimsby and the knowledge you have of Niagara region. How would this proposed legislation help make decision-making better in Niagara by changing the number of elected officials, making that a little bit smaller—like some people say, having a little bit less cooks in the kitchen make an easier result? What kind of difference is this going to make for that community?

**Mr. Tony Joose:** Thanks for the question. I should point out that I'm a former councillor.

I want to share something. January 15, 1996—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** You have one minute left—just wanted to let you know.

**Mr. Tony Joose:** —I presented a motion which was passed by the Grimsby council to get rid of the region and set up service boards. That was January 15, 1996. I suggested a service board for water, sanitary and waste management.

To get back to your question: I feel that having 12 mayors and a regional chair—the reduction in politicians will help streamline the approval process. All 12 will be accountable to their residents via the election every year. I'm hoping that instead of having the 30 around the table and they all have questions and it just prolongs development applications and it breaks down into committee—so this committee holds it up and then it doesn't go to the council on time.

It just continually holds up progress. I'm talking about progress that is not a zoning change—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** I'm sorry to interrupt, but you are out of time for this round.

I will now go to the opposition. MPP Burch.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Thank you to all the presenters.

I want to start with Councillor Nisan. I really appreciate your presentation. It was very thoughtful. A lot of things I agree with, obviously.

Look, you mentioned consultation; a lot of people have today. What kind of consultation have you had, especially with respect to what do the citizens of Burlington or the region feel about the appointment of a chair and giving them those strong-chair powers? Especially in light of the fact that you seem to have done quite well for the last 26 years with electing, democratically, a chair.

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** We have had very limited opportunity to consult our residents with respect to this move.

Let's be frank: Our residents are worried about kitchen-table issues; they're not debating whether a regional chair should be elected. They are not teaching little Joey about local democracy and how important it is to have an elected role and all that. No, they are very busy people.

My concern is that, if we allow this bill to go through, it will have a deleterious impact on their quality of life. As far as the bill goes, this is the consultation, as far as I know.

I was invited to speak 24 hours ago, so I didn't have time, unfortunately, to canvas my residents about it.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** I am impressed, within 24 hours, you're actually able to put together a presentation and make it here. Even the minister couldn't do that; he appeared virtually.

I wanted to ask about one of the comments you made, which is something we've been struggling with in Niagara for a couple of months, and that's what problem are they actually trying to solve? We had a chair who was a complete disaster. He went around to, actually, some of the lower-tier councils and was asked that continuously; that was a chair appointed by the province. They couldn't answer what problem these measures were actually trying to solve or how they would solve it. Appointing a chair as opposed to electing one—how is it going to build more housing? How is it going to save any money on the tax bill?

1330

We keep hearing this thing about modernization, but what I heard in your presentation is, throwing that word "modernization" around without actually having a basis to understand what problem you're trying to solve—the word "modernization" on its own is not a reason for change, is it?

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** Modernization is excellent corporate speak to justify decisions that are already made, I would say.

As far as building housing is concerned, I have seen no evidence that strong-mayor powers have led to more housing. I know of at least one instance where they were used to block four units as of right, which is an important recommendation from the development community. So until proven otherwise, I would say that that is a false justification.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Yes, we have a bunch of examples, actually, of how strong mayor powers have been used. They've actually delayed housing because, as you mentioned, it will create these feelings within council of council not being listened to and the mayor using a third of council to override the majority.

That leads me to my next question. We've heard of other jurisdictions in the States and other places where strong-mayor powers have been implemented and the mayor can have a little subcommittee of a third of council, and they can just do whatever they want. They don't have to bring it to council. Everything is rubber-stamped, done in the backroom. That actually happens in jurisdictions. Are you concerned about a situation like that occurring when the residents have absolutely no say over who their regional chair is?

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** Well, I will say, the Municipal Act—which is obviously your act—is a brilliant piece of legislation that provides a high level of democratic governance.

However, you are absolutely correct. The rule book with strong-mayor powers does not align with requirements for open meetings and a quorum when a quorum of council is present. So the whole point of that is so that decisions are not made in secret, but a strong mayor who so wishes now has the ability to caucus with less than a majority and control the city or the region in that respect.

So yes, I'm very worried about that. It's not a problem in our municipality as yet. However, a lot of decisions have been made without public consultation, without being

made in public. They're just put on the website after they're done. That's not right.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Thanks very much, and thank you for your presentation.

I want to turn to the region of Durham because my colleague Jennifer French couldn't be here. She has spoken very passionately about the changes in Durham and had some arguments with the minister about John Henry being fired. Were they fired? Were they not fired? Without getting into that, what are the feelings in the residents in the region of Durham about losing a very competent chair to legislation that no one's been consulted on?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** One minute remaining.

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** Thank you for the question—through you, Madam Chair.

The opportunity of what had taken place, especially with our regional chair—there was some upset with the announcement. It's not that we didn't know that it was coming, but I just want to give a focus on our opportunity to work with the government and having had the ability even in the last round for the consultation about the review of governance. We're fully willing and wanting to move forward with discussions, but the most important thing that we do need to identify is that our community did speak up in 2010. Our community, 80% supported the election of the regional chair.

And I'm going to say that, as a newly elected mayor for this term, bringing together all of us across the region of Durham, we are supporting each other with the regional chair—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** I'm sorry, but we're out of time for this round.

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** That's fine. Thank you very much.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Okay. Sorry about that. We'll now go to MPP Cerjanec.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Mayor Roy, if you would like, you can finish that thought.

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** Thank you. We have worked together, not only around bringing infrastructure into place across this region, but it's also looking at how we support each other with our homelessness crisis that we are having, not only from your community in Ajax, but in Oshawa, Whitby. The supports that are there, it's a collective support, and it's always been one with the mayors and the regional chair and the councillors, that we're making decisions and we're making decisions quick and efficient.

Lastly, if we're looking at the growth of our community—and we are the fastest-growing community within the province—it is one that we as a local level are working collectively with our development community and also with the region of Durham, to ensure that we are supporting for the growth of our community.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Thank you, Mayor Roy. Thank you to everybody who has presented as well.

Mayor Roy, I would like to loop back to yourself and Durham region. As MPP in Ajax and somebody who is talking to everyone all throughout Durham region, I do want to say I think there's a wide disappointment with how this was all handled by the provincial government. There

were rumours flying around Durham region for months before any announcement took place, talking about, are we going to be removing an elected regional chair, who, as Mayor Roy noted, was decided on a referendum back in 2010? And then rumours flying out about who would potentially be the regional chair, including people who might have experience on municipal councils but people who also don't have experience on municipal councils or might be from a time that doesn't reflect today's governing reality.

Mayor Roy, I'm very curious to hear from you about what are the impacts of strong-chair powers.

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** Through you, Madam Chair—and it was just shared previously by the other speaker, that there's concern about how one would use it. Now, myself individually, I only use strong-mayor powers for our budget process. I'm concerned, because if the individual who is appointed is using the strong-chair powers, ultimately, why have a council? And the other is, if we're broken, what are we broken with? Because we haven't been identified as to what is broken within the region of Durham.

I think the collaboration between all of us, especially with the diversity of what we have as a community—we're very supportive to each other, and our current regional chair and our past regional chair, who first was appointed and then he became elected—this is an area where it's been working and we haven't had the issues. When we have a concern within our local community and it relates to the region of Durham, direct communication—like, even for myself, I just walk across the parking lot and have a conversation to be able to look at solutions of what we need in place. That's continuous, and I would say it's even stronger than ever now because of the demands that we're having throughout the community, especially as we are growing as well.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Thank you, and I think there is something to be said about being directly elected by the people, because you know then where that authority has come from. All of us are elected, don't always agree on everything all the time. I find that when folks go to the voters, there is that mutual respect that takes place as well that we're able then to sort out and solve these issues instead of wondering maybe where the push would come from.

I can tell you, in Ajax, talking to residents, one of the biggest issues that I hear is property taxes. If we're taking away an elected regional chair, do you think that in some ways it's taxation without representation?

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** Through you, Madam Chair, I do believe that, especially having gone through our recent budget process both at the local level and at the regional level. It was the number one and it is the number one concern that we're hearing from residents. It's trying to find those efficiencies in place. It's very clear we do need to find efficiencies across all levels of government. At our local level, I'm doing core services review as well as we're doing core services review over the region.

Now, that implementation of the core services review was as a result of the work of our regional chair and coun-

cillor and the senior staff members to move forward. If that's taken away and the ability through our budget process is not one where we all have the inclusive participation within it, yes, you don't have the representation at all.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Do you think that there could theoretically be a scenario with an appointed regional chair and strong-chair powers that the province could be looking for maybe a backdoor way to fund some of the services that they should be providing to municipalities?

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** Through you, Madam Chair, I can't accurately give an answer on that. That's something that is perceived. But what I can say is that through our budgets what we're seeing—and I have been asking for this as well, too—is a municipal framework revision.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** One minute remaining.

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** We need to be taking a look at how we are funded—and not only from the provincial government; it's also from the federal government. What are our responsibilities and how should we be funded and receiving that support for housing infrastructure, homelessness, health? All those are areas that seem to be falling back onto the taxpayers at this present time.

1340

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Thank you.

The other thing—and I'll just leave it there then—that I hear within the community is there is a need for much greater provincial support, especially around homelessness, especially around these kinds of services, instead of mucking around with, "Let's move around who gets appointed or elected," it would be good if the province was stepping up on those issues.

I'll leave the rest of my time. Thank you.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** We will now go to the government side. MPP Grewal.

**Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:** My question is for Councillor Nisan. It's great to see you again, always a pleasure.

I just want to talk a little bit about the changes that are being made in this bill and get your thoughts on the impacts. I'm just going to give you a little bit of the things that I've seen that have helped previously when strong-mayor powers were introduced and how that positively impacted my community in Brampton.

I would like to circle back about six or seven years ago when a previous mayor was in charge, and council wasn't able to make decisions because they weren't able to meet that threshold. That's a time when they were debating the Hurontario LRT. So Mississauga's council was put together, they made the decision to move ahead with it and they got their portion of the LRT, and Brampton lost out because they weren't able to make a collective decision and move forward within that argument that was happening within council. Once strong-mayor powers came in, those were some of the decisions that helped the city push forward and make progressive changes that they've been wanting to do outside of all the council infighting.

Some of these changes that we're bringing in here—that's just an example that I use of how it's helped streamline in other cities—our objective here is to build faster, make decisions quicker and cut red tape, and the bureau-

cracy that's involved in making some of these important decisions which affect residents for generations to come.

At a time where Halton region is under increasing pressure to deliver housing, support infrastructure quickly and there's a broad recognition that coordination and timelines at the regional level can be challenging, I just wanted to see if you would agree that there's a need for more streamlined, accountable decision-making to meet those demands so municipalities can push forward faster and these generational projects can take place quicker.

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** In Halton region, we have no problem bringing generational projects forward. I think your example with Brampton is an interesting one and it shows how in democracy sometimes decisions, looking back on them, may not be the right ones—maybe, maybe not. But if I were you, I would be very concerned about having a mayor who does not have the same interests as, perhaps, the government who could rule over their municipality with only one-third support. That's the danger. That's why we rely on Legislatures having majority rule—

**Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:** Just to pause you there on that very point. Simply put, the mayor is elected by the entire city, whereas councillors are elected by their ward. If a mayor is not moving in a direction that's not supported by the municipality, the following election cycle will clearly reflect the residents' decision based on what that mayor is doing and how things are progressing forward. The whole basis of this is—the example of Brampton I used is because, at that time, Brampton wasn't fortunate to have a council that had a united front to move things forward, whereas currently Halton maybe does. Looking forward to this, maybe four, eight, 10 years down the line, you don't know if that scenario will continue to exist the way things are moving today or if they will change. These decisions that we're making as a government, this bill, is going to help protect that to make sure there is a unanimous council decision, decisions are able to move forward and they don't get stuck in that loop.

In an example, if you had a generational project in front of you and there was conflict within the council, would these changes then help that portion of council push through those changes?

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** I think you would be under severe risk of a mayor and a third of council not supporting that generational change—NIMBYism for example. Yes, they would be accountable later into the election, but we have councils for a reason. We have boards of directors for a reason. We have Parliaments for a reason. If you would like only the mayor to have that accountability, then the same would go for the province. Why do we have Legislatures? Why not just one person who gets elected every four years? I think that would be a bad idea.

**Mr. Hardeep Singh Grewal:** Thank you for your comments here today.

I'm going to share the rest of my time with MPP Babikian.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** MPP Babikian, two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Thank you to all our presenters. My question is to Tony. Tony, in what ways do you think

a smaller council size can support more efficient decision-making?

**Mr. Tony Jooose:** The smaller council, I think, will speed up the process. In actual fact, by having our mayor on the council—one of 12, instead of one of 30—I feel that his or her voice will be heard. This is going to, in my opinion, streamline approvals and get things going.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** How can we ensure that regional governments continue to operate efficiently to meet the needs of constituents across key parts of Ontario in the face of unprecedented economic hardships and the ongoing housing crisis?

**Mr. Tony Jooose:** Well, there's a short period—through you, Madam Chair—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** You have one minute.

**Mr. Tony Jooose:** Yes, okay. I wanted to correct MPP Burch. We did have an appointed chair in Niagara, and bless his soul, he did a great job.

Getting back to the question, I feel—economic development could be streamlined. Housing approvals: Some of the planning was changed over to the municipalities, although the region still kept a number of the planners. With reducing it down to 12 with a chair, I believe that that will start the streamlining process, which will eventually help speed approvals and reviews.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** You have 18 seconds left.

Thank you very much. We will now move over to the official opposition. MPP Gates.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Thanks for everybody being here. I have got a question for Tony. Are you from Niagara Falls?  
*Interjection.*

**MPP Wayne Gates:** No, are you from Niagara Falls? I'm confused because the MPP was asking you a question about Niagara Falls. I was just wondering. I'm just asking if you are from Niagara Falls. That's yes or no. It's easy.

**Mr. Tony Jooose:** No. Grimsby, Ontario.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Thank you, I appreciate that.

I'm going to talk to Elizabeth from Durham. You made a comment that I found very, very interesting. You're a newly elected mayor. When were you elected?

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** I was first elected to Whitby council in 2006, and I became mayor in 2022.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** So you were elected councillor first and then moved into being a mayor. So you have been elected for how long now, almost four years?

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** As a mayor, yes.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** That doesn't make you a newly elected mayor. You are a cagey veteran by now.

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** I am a cagey veteran, yes.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** You're a cagey veteran, yes. And do you know what? It's a lot tougher for women to get elected in leadership positions, particularly as mayor. So you must be doing a hell of a job down in Durham and I congratulate you.

My question is—you said something that was interesting, because I am not in favour of appointing a strong chair, giving them power to do whatever they want. I don't think you are, but you made a comment that Durham region—

which I believe is opposed to Bill 100, certainly around the chair's position. You said that it's supported by 80% that it should be elected. Maybe you could elaborate on what poll you are talking about, because you said it was supported by 80%.

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** In 2010, there was a referendum that was done in the region of Durham in the election, and 80% of the community members and the residents responded with supporting the election of the regional chair. In the next election, we elected the regional chair.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Him or her, I'm not sure—is that Mr. Henry? Is that who it is?

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** In 2014, it was Roger Anderson, who has now passed away, and then it became John Henry.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** So your community supported elected. Do you support that everybody should be elected? I'm just asking because I have been elected now for a number of years, but I lost seven times. It's not that I'm proud of that, but the reality is that that's our democratic process: You run. You try to get votes. Sometimes you don't get enough of them.

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So, do you believe that everybody should be elected?

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** If we're at the table together and everyone else is elected, we all should be elected, yes.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Okay. You talked a little bit around transit and a little bit around long-term care. Do you have a lot of long-term-care or retirement homes in Durham?

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** Within the region of Durham, under our jurisdiction, we have a total of four, and about to be five, long-term care. I sit as the chair of health and social services, and we are expanding the long-term care. But with the homelessness, we're also expanding with the number of shelters that we have across our community as well.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** And the homes are good? They're well maintained, lots of staff, meeting the four hours criteria?

**Ms. Elizabeth Roy:** Yes—

**MPP Wayne Gates:** The reason why I say that is that, as the long-term-care critic, retirement homes and home care, we find that regional homes are better. They have staffing. It's not about profit; it's about care. I wanted to just compliment you that you guys are doing a great job on that, because I have no complaints from your area at all from regional homes. So I appreciate that.

I'm going to go to Rory. You're ward 3 in Burlington? Who is your mayor?

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** Mayor Marianne Meed Ward.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** She's a really good mayor too. You can say that. It's good for you to say yes, just to help you out here.

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** No comments, Wayne.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** She's a very good mayor. I've done a couple of press conferences with her over prostate cancer.

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** Wonderful.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** She came in and spoke on it, did a really good job, and really represents Burlington and your community well. She has a lot of presence when she walks in a room.

I'm glad you're here. I was really impressed with some of the stuff you said. You talked about strong-mayor powers and the problem. Why don't you elaborate on what you see as a problem with strong-mayor powers?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** It's a minute and 30 seconds left, just to let you know.

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** So, 30 seconds. Well—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** One minute and 30.

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** Oh, 1:30—excellent.

Well, one of the problems with strong-mayor powers or strong-chair powers is that decision-making can be made without public consultation. As a result of that, it makes the business climate much more challenging in a municipality with the strong-mayor powers, because they're unsure of a process. They're unsure what could happen next.

For example—this is just an example—they could be a developer of a large community trying to build homes in our community, could be working hand-in-glove with the chief administrative officer, attempting to do something that is a win-win for everyone, and then find out the next day the CAO is no longer employed. Again, not a Burlington example, but this is exactly what could happen in municipalities under strong-mayor powers.

Go ahead, Wayne.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Just want to ask you a quick question: How much consultation did you have in Burlington over Bill 100?

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** Very limited, I will say. Halton region, we passed a resolution opposed to this. You may have heard that from my colleague this morning. Even that, we had to go past our usual timelines to get it on the books before it was too late, and I only had 24 hours' notice to appear here today, Wayne.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** So everybody had 24 hours—not fair. Who asked you to come today?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you. We're out of time.

MPP Cerjanec from the third party, please go ahead.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Through you, Chair: Tony, I've got a question. Are you currently on the PC Party of Ontario executive?

*Failure of sound system.*

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I think you might be on mute there.

**Mr. Tony Joesse:** Oh.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I'll just repeat it: Tony, are you on the PC Party of Ontario executive?

**Mr. Tony Joesse:** Yes, as of the end of January. Yes.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Okay, thank you. Will you be putting your name forward to be regional chair in Niagara region should these changes go through at the provincial level?

**Mr. Tony Joesse:** I don't know the process. Some have suggested it, but I'm still working for a publicly traded company.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Okay, thank you.

I know recently in Niagara region, Niagara region council voted 23 to 2 to initiate a service delivery and governance review of the region. Do you support Niagara regional council's efforts to do a service delivery review of the region

on how to bring down the costs of services and deliver those services more effectively?

**Mr. Tony Joosse:** You know, maybe it's my age; I've been around so long, I think we've been through six or seven of these studies at the region. We need action instead of studies.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I think that what the region itself was proposing is to actually see what else they can bring down. Do you think that these changes are going to lower property taxes for Niagara region residents or raise them?

**Mr. Tony Joosse:** In the long term, we can compare ourselves to the Hamilton amalgamation back in the 1990s. It will take a while, but I honestly believe the endgame will be lower taxes for the residents, which is long overdue after having 25% increases in the last three years.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Thank you. I'll just leave one as a comment: When we've looked at other amalgamations that have taken place, we've seen that it hasn't resulted, necessarily, in savings, so maybe we'll agree to disagree on that one.

Councillor Nisan, I really appreciate your presentation today and being here. I'm very curious for your thoughts on if you think that appointing a strong chair and using strong-chair powers might be a backdoor way for the province to increase, really, the tax burden on residents and avoid paying for some of the services that the province should be paying for.

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** I won't speculate, MPP Cerjanec. But what I will say is that, around a year ago, I asked Halton regional staff to show me the bill for all the items that the province had committed to fund Halton region for and had not come through on—everything from forgiven development charges they promised to make us whole on to homelessness and housing supports.

The annual figure is roughly \$41 million that the province has promised to support us. That money has to come from somewhere. So right now, the regional tax base is paying for us. I'm sorry, but I do not believe that an appointed chair will work to get us that money back.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Thank you. I was wondering if you had any other thoughts based on what you've heard this afternoon.

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** Yes, thank you. I'll just say that, going back, I believe this process really started in 2018, when the Peel region chair role was appointed in the middle of an election. We are now two days away from the municipal election opening up. These matters of democracy should not be modified in the middle of an election, at the very least.

The only other thing I'll mention is there's a lot of talk about housing. Having been on the ground level now for eight years, what is obvious—and we are always receiving changes from the provincial government with, I believe, a good-faith effort to speed up housing.

But who is in charge of the Planning Act in the end? It's not going to be a strong chair, strong mayor or a council; it is the province. If the province wants to see us move housing faster, they have the tools. They set the deadlines for us. They made them shorter. We meet those deadlines, so we're delivering that housing on the timelines that were set. But

in the end, the provincial government sets the rules, so go ahead and set them.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Thank you. My question, as well to Councillor Nisan—to become a mayor or a regional chair, typically it's good to have some municipal knowledge or experience on how things work, especially when we're talking about regional government, which is two tiers. There are two different layers to it, so it's a little bit more complex. There's a little bit more relationships there.

If we have a regional chair without any municipal knowledge and who never campaigned for the role, do you think that they would truly understand the issues going on within the communities across, let's say, Halton region and be able to address them across the entire region?

**Mr. Rory Nisan:** I guess that's the whole point of democracy, is that by having an election, the right person will hopefully be elected by the people. If it's appointed, it could be someone good. It could be someone who maybe has been there. Maybe they sat on regional council; great. It could not be, though, and it'll be subject to the whims of the minister.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** One minute remaining.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** I think that's some of the concern that we're hearing today, because we don't know who is going to be appointed. We don't know if it's going to be somebody on the PC Party executive, for example. We don't know if it's going to be somebody who might've been a former MPP who wasn't re-elected. We don't know who would be appointed.

I think what I'm hearing within my community in Durham region are very serious concerns around who the next regional chair might be and whether the very serious issues that we're dealing with in Ajax and Durham region are going to be addressed or not.

1400

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** We'll now thank the presenters here and ask the next group of presenters to either come—I guess everybody is onscreen for the next round.

MR. FRANK CAMPION

MR. PETER SECORD

CITY OF NIAGARA FALLS

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** We have city of Niagara Falls—Mayor Jim Diodati—

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Yes, he's just not on the screen yet.

But we have Frank Campion and Peter Secord, so we might as well start, if you don't mind, gentlemen.

Frank, would you just like to state your name before anyone speaks, and you can begin, up to seven minutes, if you'd like.

**Mr. Frank Campion:** Sure, yes. Thank you very much. My name is Frank Campion, and I'm the mayor of the city of Welland, Ontario.

May I proceed, Chair?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Yes, please.

**Mr. Frank Campion:** Thank you, Chair and members of committee. I appreciate this opportunity to provide my personal comments and support for Bill 100. I'm here today to voice my strong support of the bill, Better Regional Governance Act, because I believe it will help Welland and all of Niagara in dealing more effectively with challenges and opportunities as they present themselves in today's world.

My priorities are clear: working to attract and retain jobs, support growing industrial and logistics base, revitalizing neighbourhoods and ensuring that families can find homes they can afford. Every one of those goals is deeply affected by how regional government is structured and how quickly it can make decisions on housing, servicing, transportation and critical infrastructure.

When regional governance is aligned and focused on local needs, cities can rely on identified regional service and move forward cost-effectively and efficiently. One of the key elements of that is focusing on what they're supposed to be doing at a regional level. When it slows or is unclear, our residents and businesses pay the price both financially and socially. Currently, Niagara's regional structure is in need of change in order to meet the current realities and circumstances. Simply put, the government's model implemented in the 1970s does not work in today's world. Many, many things have changed, but regional governance has not.

The size of regional council, with more than 30 members, makes it difficult to move decisively, to set priorities, and very much made to maintain clear lines of accountability. It drifts away from regional core competencies and mandated service deliveries. We see that happen quite often, where we're going off track, dealing with things that we're not supposed to be dealing with. This translates into delays on projects that really matter, duplication of effort, which is a considerable barrier for moving forward, and too much time spent navigating process instead of delivering results—so, talking about things more than we need to without actually getting things done.

Bill 100 addresses these problems directly by proposing a streamlined council that is better suited to the scale of our region, the urgency of our challenges, as well as identifying and adhering to the scope of regional services provided to area municipalities. Area municipalities rely on the region for particular services, and they have to be delivered.

Under this legislation, regional council would be composed of 12 local mayors and a regional chair, for a total of 13 members. That structure make sense to me. Mayors are already the individuals who are directly accountable to their communities for growth, housing, local infrastructure and services. They are in their communities every day. Mayors are a direct conduit—and this is an important part of the puzzle here—between their councils, residents, businesses and business owners and bringing their voices to the regional table. It's a direct line. Mayors see first-hand where the gaps are. A smaller regional table will create a body that is more focused, more accountable, more efficient and

better equipped to act as a true regional decision-making board, based on input from their communities.

Welland is a city in transition and growth, as are all of the municipalities within the Niagara region. The city of Welland is strategically located in the heart of Niagara and has direct access to transportation corridors, a strong industrial base and increasing interested investors who see potential. And that, again, is important for our municipality in the sense that we are on the move, attracting more and more jobs, almost on a daily basis.

Unlocking that potential depends on timely decisions about servicing, transportation, land use that often gets hung up at the regional level. It's a piece of red tape, in my mind. When regional decisions are delayed, projects in Welland are delayed. When decisions are clear and timely, we can get shovels in the ground and jobs created and homes built very, very quickly. We're very good at that.

Bill 100 is designed to strengthen regional governance to speed up decision-making, reduce costs and move more quickly on housing and infrastructure. These aren't abstract goals. There is growing demand for housing from young families; from workers coming into our community; and from seniors, particularly seniors who need to downsize and are looking to stay in the community along with their families. We see the need for infrastructure investment to support that growth: roads, water, sewer, waste water, community amenities etc. Regional systems that can respond quickly and coherently are essential if we want to meet those needs in a responsible way.

The bill also confirms and expands strong leadership at the regional level to appoint a regional chair with clearly defined tools to advance housing and infrastructure priorities. This means that we will work within a regional framework where there is a clear leader responsible for aligning regional actions with provincial priorities and helping cut through unnecessary delays on projects that are clearly in the public interest.

In practice, this means fewer situations where important regional files bounce between committees or stall because there are too many competing priorities and not enough clarity about who is doing the agenda, instead of a smaller council made up of local leaders working with the regional chair, who is expected to focus on delivering housing and infrastructure outcomes and other items. The result is visible progress. We can see things happening where it's quite often delayed—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** One minute remaining.

**Mr. Frank Campion:** Okay. I'll kind of skip forward just a little bit.

From the taxpayer's standpoint, clarity is essential for people. The duplication of services are problems for the municipality and for businesses. Every necessary step needs to eliminate redundancy and other items.

I'm going to have to skip through here very quickly.

For those who are worried that a smaller regional council might mean fewer voices, I would emphasize that local councils and mayors remain very close to their communities. The direct connection does not disappear but actually increases because actions at the regional table are more

directly connected to residents' needs through local councils via their mayors. If anything, it becomes more meaningful for the communities which the Niagara region services. Bill 100 moves us in that direction and modernizes the infrastructure—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** I'm sorry; I know you're talking fast, but your time is up. Thank you very much.

I will now ask Peter Secord to do a presentation. Just state your name before. You have up to seven minutes. You can begin.

**Mr. Peter Secord:** Thank you, Chair and members of the committee, colleagues and residents who are following these proceedings. My name is Peter Secord, and I have the honour of having served as a past city councillor and a current regional councillor here in the city of St. Catharines.

I am here today to express my strong support for Bill 100, fully aware that if it passes in its current form, I will eliminate my own position at the region. I want to say that openly at the outset because I think it matters. Too often when we discuss governance reform, the conversation gets clouded by questions about who keeps their seat and who does not. I'm not here to defend my seat. I'm here to defend the interests of the people of St. Catharines and of the Niagara region. If the best way to serve those people is through a smaller, more focused regional council made up of mayors and a strong regional chair, then I'm prepared to support that.

Over many years in office, I have seen both the strengths and the weaknesses of our current regional structure. I have worked alongside dedicated colleagues who care deeply about their communities and the region, but I have also seen how a council of more than 30 members can struggle to act with any speed, clarity or cohesion. When you have that many people around the table, it becomes harder to set priorities, harder to move quickly and harder for residents to understand who is truly accountable when decisions are delayed and when opportunities are missed.

The core issues facing Niagara right now are not mysterious. We are dealing with a housing crisis that's pushing home ownership and even rental housing out of the reach of many residents. We are managing an aging infrastructure, and at the same time, we're trying to plan for growth. We are competing for investment, jobs and talent in a rapidly changing economy. All that requires a regional government that can act quickly, particularly on housing and infrastructure, and Bill 100 is about giving Niagara that kind of government.

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The proposal to reduce regional council to 13 members, comprised of the 12 mayors and the regional chairs, is a significant change. I agree with that, but for some, it's understandably unsettling. For those of us whose current positions will be eliminated, it is certainly personal, but good governance means putting the public interest ahead of our own interests. A smaller council is more likely to function like a true regional board of directors: focused on strategic issues, capable of faster decision-making and easier for residents to follow and hold people to account.

From the perspective of St. Catharines, this matters a great deal. We are the largest city here in Niagara, with com-

plex needs in housing, infrastructure, transit and economic development, just to name a few. Our residents need a regional council that can meet those needs, not structures that turn big decisions into prolonged exercises in process. I believe a council composed of mayors supported by a strong and accountable regional chair will be better positioned to deliver the coordinated, timely decisions that the cities like St. Catharines require.

One concern I have heard is that eliminating directly elected regional councillors weakens the voice of the residents. As someone whose position is going to be eliminated, I want to address that directly. The mayors who will sit at the regional table under this model are already directly elected, and they are deeply accountable to their communities. They are in constant contact with residents, businesses and community groups. Their political survival depends on listening and responding to local concerns. In that sense, the local voice is not being silenced; it is being concentrated into the people who carry much of the burden here in Niagara.

I also want to speak about efficiency. Residents in St. Catharines do not come to me complaining about too many meetings; they come to me frustrated when important projects take too long, the different levels of government seem out of sync, and their priorities like housing and infrastructure get bogged down in approvals and debates that stretch out for years. Every delay has a cost, and a governance structure that is simpler and cleaner can help reduce those delays and costs.

Bill 100 also recognizes the need for strong leadership at the regional level, particularly on housing and infrastructure. Giving the regional chair clearly defined powers in this area is not about concentrating power for its own sake; it's about making someone have the tools and the responsibility to drive the regional priorities that we all agree upon. At this time, the chair will be working with mayors who are themselves accountable to their communities. That balance of a strong regional leader with strong local leaders is, in my view, a reasonable and practical way to ensure that we move forward.

Some might say that a sitting regional councillor supporting a bill that removes his own role is an admission that the current system failed. I don't see it that way. I see it as an acknowledgement that circumstances change and the structures which serve us one way or another must change now. Regional government in Niagara has done important work over the years, but today we face challenges of a different scale and urgency. We need structures that match that reality.

I am proud of the work I have done both at the city and the region here in St. Catharines. I have tried to ask the hard questions, to represent my community honestly and to contribute to thoughtful discussions around the regional table. Supporting Bill 100 does not diminish that work. If this bill passes and the role ends, I will leave knowing that we have taken a step toward a regional government that is clearer, faster and more focused on what really matters: getting homes built, maintaining and improving our infrastructure, delivering value for the taxpayers who fund the

system. I will leave knowing that the mayors of our 12 municipalities will be at the regional table with a strong chair and that, together, they have a structure that gives them a better change to succeed.

To those who are undecided, I would ask you to look past the question of who sits in the chair and focus instead on the structure that will serve the people best here in Niagara. Ask whether our current system is truly delivering the speed, coherence and accountability we need. Ask whether residents understand who is responsible for regional decisions and whether they believe the system is working for them at all. If the answer is no, then we have an obligation to look at this.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** One minute left.

**Mr. Peter Secord:** In closing, I support Bill 100 because I believe it is right for the region I have been proud to serve. On behalf of the residents of St. Catharines, who I represent today, I urge you to support the legislation and give Niagara a regional government that is better equipped here for people in Niagara.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair and members.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you for your presentation.

We will now move on. Our final presenter of this round is city of Niagara Falls mayor Jim Diodati.

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Thank you, Chair and members of committee, colleagues and residents. My name is Jim Diodati, the mayor of Niagara Falls.

Can you hear me? Are you able to hear me?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Yes.

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Okay. My name is Jim Diodati, the mayor of Niagara Falls. My job is simple: housing, economy, infrastructure. When governance works, we deliver. When it doesn't, we manage a process instead of solving problems.

Niagara is stuck in process, and the residents are feeling it with high taxes, rising costs, low efficiency. The structure is too large for the population that it serves. The numbers are clear. Niagara has one politician per 4,200 residents. Toronto has one per 108,000 residents. That is not a small gap; it's a structural problem.

We also have more staff per resident, driving costs higher. This falls directly onto the backs of taxpayers and they're already stretched. Residential taxes are well above the provincial average—in fact, 14.2% higher than the provincial average for residential and 24.3% above the provincial average for industrial taxes, where we create the jobs.

Our debt is \$2,100 per person in Niagara. Compare that just up to the highway to Hamilton—\$600 per resident in Hamilton. That's a significant burden and it's growing. If we stay on this path, we're looking at double-digit yearly tax increases to stand still. That's not sustainable.

At the core of its governance, Niagara regional council is larger than Toronto's, even though we serve far fewer people. The decisions, the priorities—everything is blurred. The accountability has been weakened, so the results are delay, duplication and drift.

Bill 100 fixes that. It proposes a 13-member council with 12 mayors and a chair—smaller, focused and accountable. The mayors are already elected. This brings decision-making to those directly responsible. It shifts from discussion to decisions. The urgency is real: Families can't find housing, seniors can't downsize and businesses are delayed. Every delay adds costs and pushes opportunity out of reach.

Bill 100 helps us to move faster, cuts duplication, speeds approvals and it will deliver infrastructure. It also introduces stronger regional leadership. And this is not about removing local voices: They remain with the elected mayors. This is about clear authority to act. What we gain is alignment; here locally, regionally and provincially—all rolling in the same direction.

The residents care about results, not structure. They want the roads plowed, services delivered and they want their tax dollars respected.

This has been studied many times through the years: the Berkeley report, provincial reviews, standing committees. We need to act and this is going to require brave leadership. We need to stop protecting the status quo. Our job is not to preserve structures; it's to serve the residents. If this means fewer roles, including my own, so be it. This is about the right thing to do.

It's not right or wrong; it's about effective versus ineffective. And if this new model can reduce duplication, lower costs improve service and preserve identity, we owe that to the residents. Because doing nothing has a cost: higher taxes, rising debt, slower growth, fewer opportunities. And I want my children and eventually my grandchildren to inherit that.

We've got a choice now to avoid these tough decisions right now or we do what's right. Bill 100 is a step forward. It gives us the tools we need to move quicker, smarter and with better results. So on behalf of the residents of Niagara Falls, I urge you to support Bill 100. Thank you very much.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you for your presentations.

We'll now start with the questions. We're going to go to the official opposition. MPP Gates.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I am going to start my questions with Mayor Campion and then I will do Mayor Diodati—not necessarily do Mayor Diodati, but ask you questions in the next part, all right? Okay, Jim? So you can prepare for that.

Mayor Campion, how are you? It's good seeing you again.

**Mr. Frank Campion:** I'm doing well.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** It's always a pleasure to see you, but I've got a really safe question for you that I'm sure you can answer pretty quickly. Have you or are you applying for the strong-chair powers position?

**Mr. Frank Campion:** It's an interesting question in the sense that I don't think there is an application process. So the answer would be no, I'm not applying. I have made it clear that, if I was called upon to do it, I would probably say yes, but I haven't put an application in or lobbied or spoken about it.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** That's a fair response. I know that there's no—but I had heard rumours through the grapevine

that you were considering it, so I thought it was fair to ask you. Rather than rumours, I could get a chance to ask you right here. We're not really live, you're on Zoom, but thanks I really appreciate you being honest with the answer.

It would be slightly different with Welland. The tone should—oops, sorry, it's a whole other thing. Okay, I'm going to say something else.

Mayor, Welland has seen significant growth pressures, and I understand why infrastructure capacity matters to your municipality. So my question to you: Mayor, would you agree that infrastructure capacity—roads, pipes, water, waste water and housing-enabling infrastructure—requires actual capital funding, not just changes to municipal funding governance?

1420

**Mr. Frank Campion:** Well, municipal funding is capital funding as well. I'm not sure if you are requesting or asking where the capital funding comes from. Certainly, it relies on upper levels of government, federally and provincially, to provide funding for us to be able to afford that infrastructure. I don't know if that answers your question, but it's a three-piece or a four-piece puzzle. We need all levels of government pitching in for infrastructure.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Mayor, have you seen public, Niagara-specific financial analysis showing that Bill 100 would reduce costs for Welland residents or reduce the infrastructure backlog?

**Mr. Frank Campion:** No.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** You haven't?

**Mr. Frank Campion:** No.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Not at all?

**Mr. Frank Campion:** No.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** If that's the case, why are you supporting to have strong-chair powers appointed rather than elected?

**Mr. Frank Campion:** I'm not sure that those two questions are related, but I can answer the question with regard to strong-chair powers. In my mind, in being a strong mayor, the biggest benefit is stability. If the mayor—or the chair in this particular instance—has control over senior staff and CAOs etc., it provides stability to the entire organization because this person is not going to be removed on a whim, if there are issues with council or things like that. It provides a stability.

But, also, the same is true for the council in knowing those powers are there, and the council can actually leverage those powers. So it's not singularly for the chair, but it can be also utilized through the direction from the members of council.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Just a quick question: As mayor of Welland, have you ever used strong-mayor powers?

**Mr. Frank Campion:** Yes.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** How many times?

**Mr. Frank Campion:** I couldn't give you an accurate number, but if you look at my website, you'll be able to find it there. I have used it to appoint CAOs. I've done that twice.

That's really what I was referring to with the benefits of strong-mayor powers. It's identifying an individual that

can work with the chair. It's very important that those two individuals or positions work very closely together to move things forward and also to drive the agenda.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Thank you.

Would you agree that changing governance does not, by itself, create the capital dollars needed for waste water plants and core infrastructure?

**Mr. Frank Campion:** I would say I wouldn't agree with that entirely, because I think what this Bill 100 will be doing is also focusing on what is it that the region is actually supposed to be doing, and, quite often, we're doing things that we shouldn't be involved in, which is directing monies away from those infrastructure projects and from those things. It will potentially free up money that's being spent where it's not supposed to be spent, on things that it needs to be spent on.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Have I got time left?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Yes, one minute and 20 seconds.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Perfect.

Would you support asking the province to release the Seiling-Fenn report before this bill moves forward? That was done in 2019, I believe, and it's never been released to the public.

**Mr. Frank Campion:** I was involved in that back in the day. I think that's up to the province to determine if they want to release it or not—they will have reasons for releasing it or not releasing it—and it's beyond my purview as a mayor.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Thank you. I'm good.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you very much. It's to the third party. MPP Blais.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Thank you, everyone, for presenting today.

Mayor Campion, you mentioned just a few moments ago that you would put yourself into consideration for the chair position. Does that mean you don't intend to run for re-election as mayor of Welland?

**Mr. Frank Campion:** I haven't made that determination yet. My preference would be probably to assist as the chair of the region, but I haven't made a confirmed determination if I'm going to run for mayor or not at this point.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Madam Chair, point of order.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Point of order—MPP Babikian.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Madam Chair, I realize that the opposition is trying to question the credibility and the intent of the witnesses. The witnesses belong to all political parties, all ideologies. On this side, we never raised that question towards the witnesses. One of them here even ran for the leadership of the Liberal Party. We never brought that issue. It is dishonest of the opposition to start questioning the intent and the credibility of the witnesses. You have to—

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Sorry. Can I respond?

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** It's a fair point by MPP Babikian. If you could stay to the legislation that we're discussing—

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** He presented himself as a candidate for the position we're discussing as part of the legislation.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** He never said that.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** He did. In response to a question, he did. If you're paying attention—

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** He never said that.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** I think all members—

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I'll have Hansard read it back. Should we have Hansard read it back, Madam Chair? Perhaps Hansard can read it back to Mr. Babikian. If he was paying attention, he would have understood that, in fact, the witness did respond.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Okay, thank you, MPP Blais.

I think carry on and stick to the principles in the bill if you can, please. But you can ask questions.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Sure, I will continue with the principles of the bill.

One of the principles of the bill is the government will appoint an unelected chair of a region with strong powers. That is one of the core principles of the bill, arguably the most essential and disturbing part of the bill. So I just want to reiterate that for the members of the government, who may or may not be paying close attention to the discussion today—but anyway.

Mr. Diodati, you're the mayor of Niagara Falls. I understand you were elected mayor in 2010. Did I get that right?

*Failure of sound system.*

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Sorry, I think you're muted.

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Okay. Yes, you are correct.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I would characterize that a large portion of your advocacy for the bill today was related to cost structures. You have cost issues in Niagara. Taxes have gone up. You've borrowed a lot of money. You don't have the kind of money you need for infrastructure and other issues that you've been facing in the last 16 years, I guess, as mayor. Those are all perfectly fine and, obviously, a disappointing situation in Niagara.

Earlier today, shortly after 9:30 or so, the Minister of Municipal Affairs said that he did not believe this bill would actually save Niagara very much money, if any money at all. So if the minister who is proposing the bill says it won't actually save any money, I'm wondering your perspective as to how that will alleviate the 30%-to-50% tax increase that has happened since 2010, the infrastructure deficit that has occurred since 2010 or any of the other financial challenges that are being faced in Niagara at the moment.

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** I think that's a good question. I think it's the first step in the right direction. Originally, we were pushing for much more. I know we were looking at different governance options of one city or four cities or five cities, and I know our CAO, who has got a corporate finance background—he spent 18 years at Deloitte—crunched the numbers for us. He said by going to four cities, Niagara Falls would save \$14 million per year. And he did crunch the numbers.

I know that we've diluted this a little bit and backed off because there were lots of different concerns—some valid, maybe some not so valid. But I think it's the first step to move forward. The problem right now is we have too many cooks in the kitchen and we can't make decisions.

We've got more municipally elected officials than MPPs in the province of Ontario, and significantly more than Hamilton or Toronto. So it's just been very hard to move the ball forward on meaningful decisions. I think this will definitely help streamline the decisions, and then we're going to have to look at some more governance reforms, I believe, next steps.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** That's fair enough. I don't think anyone disagrees that a governance change in Niagara is needed. In fact, we wrote the minister recommending that he engage in comprehensive consultations and perhaps even a referendum or a plebiscite to speak to people in Niagara as to what they themselves wanted.

You said this is the first step and hopefully you'll be able to move the ball forward, I suppose, on bigger changes in the next term of council. Do you think the strong-mayor powers will make that easier? Because, as I understand it, and according to the minister this morning, the strong powers are limited to housing, infrastructure, emergency services and economic development.

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So I'm wondering how the strong powers to the unelected, appointed chair will allow you to make greater progress on the governance challenges that will—the next step of governance improvements might actually save you money, but this step won't save you money.

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Yes, right. But this kind of lines us up for the next step—

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Sure. But how do the strong-mayor powers help get you to that next step?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Well, again—yet to be seen. We're still waiting to see where we're going to land.

I do think there's going to be a lot more alignment than there was in the past having mayors. Mayors typically represent their city and the region, whereas the regional councillors don't necessarily, and their purview is very different. I think it's not going to be as necessary. But having said that, without a strong mandate and some strong powers, it's going to be harder to get to the next step, and that's our concern. I think that we've been trying for 56 years to make changes in the region and it's never happened—study after study. So I think we've got to give them a big hammer.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Okay. So how does appointing someone who's not been elected create a strong mandate? Because you just said a strong mandate is important. Someone who's unelected, by default, has no mandate, or at least not a mandate from the people.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Forty-five seconds left.

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** I believe the mandate's going to come from the Minister of Municipal Affairs with a focus on economic development, housing, infrastructure—right now. If everything's a priority, nothing's been a priority.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Absolutely. Can you, Mayor, explain to me what decisions regional council makes that are not related to housing, infrastructure, emergency services or economic development?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Most of our dialogue—80%—is around things other than our core services, and we entertain funding for all sorts of—

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Isn't that, really, the lack of the ability of the chair of the council to control the discussion of council?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Yes, but when council—

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** I'm afraid we're out of time for the end of that response.

Going to the government side: MPP Saunderson.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** I want to thank all our presenters for taking time today to give us their opinions and the benefit of their experience and expertise. I'm going to focus my questions on the two mayors, Mayor Campion and Mayor Diodati.

Before getting into provincial politics, I was the mayor of the town of Collingwood and a member of Simcoe county council, and the Simcoe county council is the other council that is having a governance change in this legislation. I can tell you, from the Simcoe county perspective, we had done numerous studies, going back to the late 1990s, about county composition. They have 32 members from the 16 local member municipalities. The mayor and deputy mayor had asked the province to go to 16 elected mayors and an appointed warden from this county, but not a municipally elected official, to try and get that outside perspective, that overarching perspective.

What we saw in a lot of those studies was frustration with voting systems, with the inability to move forward and for discussions to be going on far too long, to the point that, after the county looking at changing their structure, which would require the municipalities to approve it and representing over 50% of the population—that happened, and they still couldn't get it across the line. So the warden wrote to the province asking for this to happen.

In the case of Niagara region, we've certainly heard a lot of frustrations from both the mayors. I'm wondering if, individually—and I'll start with you, Mayor Diodati—you can talk about your frustrations with moving forward important projects that would assist your municipality and also help potentially to lower debt and lower taxes at the same time by getting things in the ground.

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** I firmly believe that it's the economic development mule that pulls the community services cart. In other words, if you have more job creation, investment, economic development, the monies that come as a result of that are going to help fund your social programs. And one of our councillors said before, "You need a job to get a house; you don't need a house to have a job"—so focusing on economic development.

But sometimes we'll have some people that don't have, maybe, a business background or don't understand the process of why a company would want to locate in your community or not locate. They don't understand, when you have incentives—whether it be a brownfield incentive or CIP areas—it's bait on the hook to bring these companies to create the jobs; for the investment and the economic development. But then you've got other people who say, "No, no; there shouldn't be any money to incentivize companies to come. Just give it to social services." We're trying to say, "You're going to get it for social services if you get the jobs and investment."

It's continual, and the mayors are outnumbered at the region, so if the regional councillors are going in a different direction, we lose every time. And it's frustrating when they refer to it as "corporate welfare" when they don't understand we're going to get more money back than we put into it.

We talk about it ad nauseam. It's like Groundhog Day: We have the same discussion over and over and nothing ends up happening. We talk for hours on end; we don't make decisions. And that's one example; there are so many examples of exactly that. We have that exact CIP discussion every year. We debate, "We should get rid of it and put more money towards this," and we're like, "Oh, my gosh, guys." So that's one tangible example that I could show you.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Thanks very much.

Mayor Campion, I'll go to you. As a former rower, I spent a long time going backwards on your great canal there, but I also remember when Massey Ferguson closed its plant. That had a horrendous impact on your community. I know you've come back from that, but I'm wondering if you can talk about some of the frustrations you've had at county council and how that's impacted your community.

**Mr. Frank Campion:** Thank you for that question. I'm glad you enjoyed your time on our canal.

I think the bottom line is—I'll put it into perspective. I was first elected in 1991, so I've been in the city of Welland a long time. Back in the mid-1990s, about six major employers closed in the city of Welland, which shifted almost all of the tax burden onto the residential folks because we didn't have that tax income anymore.

So the drive has been to create more wealth in the community via investment, industry and employment. And Jim is right: In order to do that—it's a very competitive market, particularly when we're located right beside the US border. We were losing a lot of industry to the US because we had no incentives where they had lots of incentives. So introduce incentives—this is what's making things happen, and it needs to be a partnership so that everyone is aligned.

When we offer incentives, they actually work. We can prove that they work. I think the concept from the region and regional councillors is they don't work. But as Jim says, mayors can actually see that they're working because we offered the incentives and this is how we landed GE. We landed General Electric based on two things: being able to get them in the ground quickly, because they had to get up and running, and the incentive packages and the assistance that we provide for them. Without that, we would not have had that GE—which is now INNIO—plant, which is employing about 270 people in the city of Welland.

We need to replace all of those businesses that have gone because that's where the wealth has gone. The wealth has disappeared because people don't have jobs. We need to balance it back out where we have those jobs, where we have the businesses operating and creating wealth.

And when we talk about wealth, it's people having money so that we can offset the taxes, number one—so we have more industrial taxes coming in, which offsets the need to

go to the resident—but it's also creating jobs for them so that they can afford to live, and also to afford to be able to provide funding for social services which are required for people who do not have jobs or who have difficulty with jobs. It's an equation that works by creating that wealth and putting the money back into the community so we can actually afford to pay the taxes that are required to support people on social assistance.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Thank you very much, both mayors, for your answers. They were very helpful.

**The Chair (Hon. Laurie Scott):** Thank you. That's the end of our time. Sorry, I did not get a warning in.

Over to the official opposition. MPP Gates.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Thank you very much. I'm going to do most of this with Mayor Jim.

A question for Jim; the first one should be easy. Sabres are hot. We've lit up the Falls many, many times for the Bills. Are you going to light up the falls for the Sabres tonight?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Yes, we are. We already have done it once. We wish them well to take out the Bruins.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Yes, I know. And I know you go to games as well, like I do. We're all cheering for the Sabres in Niagara, that's for sure.

Mayor, you have been clear that Niagara Falls has serious infrastructure pressures, particularly around water and waste water. I do not dispute that. Niagara region's own asset management work shows a \$2.76-billion deferred capital backlog, and the FAO has identified a \$52.1-billion municipal infrastructure backlog around Ontario.

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My question to you, Mayor Jim, is: Would you agree that the Niagara infrastructure deficit is part of a broader municipal infrastructural problem and not something unique to the Niagara governance structure?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Yes, I think every municipality is facing infrastructure deficits. There's no question about it. This is a global phenomenon. And now, with the new taxing rules, we're forced to save for our assets as soon as they're built, so when it comes time to replace them, we're able to do that. We didn't do that, years ago; we just built and didn't worry about rebuilding.

So yes. And here in Niagara specifically, our waste water treatment plant situation—we're about to run out of capacity and we need to build a new Niagara south waste water treatment plant. We've acquired the land, but we're going to need funding from all levels of government to get this forward. But we're not going to be building new houses or new businesses.

I know myself and Mayor Campion are very concerned that we don't get commitments. Because if we don't, growth is going to stagnate in Niagara.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Yes, well, as you know, I've raised it a number of times at Queen's Park and I know you've raised it with Tony as well. The municipality and the region have already committed their part of it, but we certainly need a partner at the provincial level and federal level. I agree 100% with it.

Mayor, what specific evidence have you seen that Bill 100 will reduce Niagara's infrastructural backlog as opposed to simply changing who is responsible for managing it?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** I think what I've seen is that the mayors are much quicker, streamlined and aligned in making decisions. We understand that if you can't put poop in the pipes, you're not building any houses, period. And all other issues aside, that's going to be a priority. I know that we're all looking at, number one, how we bring in industry and good jobs to our community, and how do we support it with good infrastructure? We are very focused—I'd say laser-focused—on what we need.

I just think we are going to have more of rowing the boat in the same direction with the mayors together. And also, as I said earlier to one of the other people asking questions, it's the first step. We need to take more steps—more shared services—but it's the first step in the right direction.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I have to laugh. Sorry, Jim. I picked up your punch line there, but nobody in the room did. "Poop in the pipes"—nobody else caught it. They're on their cellphones, but I did catch it, just to let you know.

Mayor, have you seen public financial analysts showing that any administrative savings from governance reform would be large enough to meaningfully reduce Niagara's multi-billion-dollar infrastructure backlog?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** I have. As I mentioned earlier, Jason Burgess, our CAO, who spent 18 years at Deloitte in corporate finance, did an analysis for us, as did the former regional CAO, Harry Schlange. They put together modelling that showed significant savings both in annual taxes and also infrastructure investment.

There is no question: The path we are on now is going to become unaffordable. We have to make some moves now if we are going to be able to afford it. Those are two financial experts, neither of which are politicians.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I appreciate that response. I know Harry quite well from AMO in his time.

Mayor, given how significant these changes could be for local residents, would you support a full public consultation in Niagara before any major governance changes are implemented?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Of course, I would support it.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Okay, I'm glad you said that, because I have a follow-up question for you. We did a report that came out—Seiling and Fenn report. That was done in 2019. We spent tens of thousands of dollars on that report. It has never been released to the public, even though it was done with public money.

So my question to you: Would you support putting pressure on this government to release that report, which has never been released?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** I would have no problem with the details of that report. I think it will further illustrate that the current model is not sustainable, that we have to make changes.

I was part of those interviews with Ken Seiling and Michael Fenn. I was a part of those, along with our former

CAO, and we were very clear. But the current path is not sustainable. We have to make changes.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** One minute.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** It's really important to release that.

And probably my last question for the Liberals and the Conservatives: It's important for all levels of governance work together, but it also doesn't mean that we have to agree with everything that Jim Diodati says, or Frank Campion does, or whoever—whatever politician it is.

I don't support unelected strong-chair powers. I think it's wrong. I have no problem if we elect a chair, whether that's done by the mayors or whether it's done by another avenue. I think that we should do some reform in Niagara when it comes to politicians. I know that Niagara-on-the-Lake—I know Niagara Falls has, because you guys went from 12 to eight, remember, a few years ago? Yes, well, I finished ninth; thank you very much. Only eight got elected.

So I know we can do that kind of stuff, but I wanted to be clear with you, Jim, here and with this committee: I don't support unelected strong-chair powers. I—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** Thank you so much. That's the time allocated.

MPP Cerjanec.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Through you, Chair, thank you both to Mayors Diodati and Campion for being here today.

I had the opportunity a little bit ago to engage with a lot of folks on different municipal councils throughout Niagara region, on both larger councils and smaller councils. Especially in some of the smaller municipalities, I'm hearing a lot of concerns about potentially being overrun by larger municipalities like Niagara Falls and St. Catharines, for example. How do you think that relationship might work now under this structure, Mayor Diodati?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Yes, thank you. Niagara Falls, we went through our last amalgamation around 1970. One of the places I'll use as an example is Chippawa because it's the hometown of James Cameron; it's where James Cameron grew up. It was amalgamated into the city of Niagara Falls, and at first, they were not happy about it. They came kicking and screaming. They were concerned they were going to lose their identity, that the city would ignore them, they wouldn't invest the money in the infrastructure.

Well, 56 years later, the outcome is quite clear: We spend more money in Chippawa than we do anywhere else in the city. So (1) they have not only not lost investment; they've got significantly more than they had before; (2) we're about to spend \$50 million to build a new community centre in Chippawa, something Chippawa itself could never afford to do, and (3) they never lost their identity. The sign is still up, "Chippawa: Hometown of James Cameron." The only thing that disappeared was the population on the bottom—

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Thank you.

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Yes, thank you.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Thank you. I just highlight this because, as I've spoken more and more to folks, some municipalities have managed their budgets quite well, quite responsibly locally, so they're very concerned about property tax increases and shifting some of that to support

some of the larger municipalities. I know across the region, cumulatively over the last three years, regional tax increases have gone up by about 23%. What was the driver of that?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** I think the problem has been too many priorities. If everything is a priority, nothing is a priority. It seems we are funding not just core things but other things of interest, not necessarily core principles.

And the other thing: With 12 communities all vying for dollars, again, what's the most important thing? Something in Welland for Mayor Campion or something in Niagara Falls for myself? I think that's been the biggest challenge. Way too many politicians—it's like too many cooks in the kitchen. We can't decide on what to put in the soup because we all have our own ideas, so we throw everything into it. It's the kitchen sink.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** Thanks, Mayor.

I'll pass it over to my colleague MPP Blais.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** MPP Blais.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Mayor Campion and Mayor Diodati, as I understand, the governance structure in Niagara—you're both on a regional council today?

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Yes.

And Mayor Diodati, Mr. Cerjanec asked you a question about tax increases as of late. I'm reading that from 2024 to 2025, the tax increase in Niagara was right around 9.6%. Does that ring a bell as true to you?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Yes, it does, and we had to fight to get it to 9.6%. It was coming in at double digits.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Yes.

Mr. Campion, does that ring true to you as well?

**Mr. Frank Campion:** Yes.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Yes, okay. So if the concern with so many elected officials on the regional council is that we can't narrow priorities—I think that's something that Mr. Diodati just said—and that spending is out of control etc., I'm wondering why then you both voted for a budget increase that would have a tax increase of 9.6% instead of just saying, "No, that's too high. I'm not going to vote for that."

**Mr. Frank Campion:** Did you want me to answer that, Chair?

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Why don't you go first, Mr. Campion? Yes.

**Mr. Frank Campion:** Okay. As Mayor Diodati indicated, it was coming in at much, much higher than that, and you have to stop the conversation at some point in order to get a budget so that you can start expending money on necessary infrastructure programs. Assuming you get that done, the better the prices are that you get because you're able to send your tenders out. We can't have a conversation running into May or June because then you're starting when you're halfway through your year. At some point, you see the writing on the wall, that this is as low as the majority of council is going to go, and so it's futile to try to delay that any further because you can't singularly—

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** But were you chair of the region during that debate?

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**Mr. Frank Campion:** No, I'm the mayor of the city of Welland.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Yes, I understand. But you weren't chairing the conversation, right?

**Mr. Frank Campion:** No.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Okay, so you still could have—

**Mr. Frank Campion:** I've never been the finance chair or the regional chair.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Fair enough. But you still could have voted no.

**Mr. Frank Campion:** The point of voting no is symbolic. Voting no is that I'm not going to approve that. However, if you continue to say no, you end up with what I just explained to you, that you end up into May and you're halfway through the budget and you haven't been able to land any tenders for your projects that you require. As I say, you see the writing on the wall, you continue to be—

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Sorry—when did the regional budget pass?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** One minute.

**Mr. Frank Campion:** I can't give you the exact date, but January, I believe.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** You thought that if you voted no for a nearly 10% tax increase, it might actually extend the conversation to May?

**Mr. Frank Campion:** It's quite possible because the writing, in my mind—you can read the room, you can read where the direction is going. You can say no and provide options in order to reduce it further. If they are not accepted, you're banging your head against the wall. I don't believe in symbolic votes. I oppose it because I oppose it—vote for me because I said no. It's a matter of, you have to move on at some point so you get your projects off the ground—

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** So you fully supported the nearly 10% tax increase—

**Mr. Frank Campion:** I supported it, but I would say, I said reluctantly supported—

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** —and now you're putting your name forward to be the unelected chair—

**Mr. Frank Campion:** I think you're trying to put words in my mouth, but—

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Let him answer the question.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I didn't ask a question, Mr. Saunderson—

**Mr. Frank Campion:** The answer to the question was—

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Why ask it if you're not going to listen to the answer—

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I didn't ask a question. I made a statement, which I'm allowed to do during this part of the—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** Thank you, gentleman. That was the time allocated for the third party.

Now we have six minutes and 30 seconds over to the government. MPP Babikian.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Thank you very much to all three presenters for coming and sharing your input with us. Also thank you for your services for your region because truly it is commendable what you're doing.

This committee is open to everyone, every witness, regardless of their political affiliation, religion, race and ethnicity because this is true democracy: People can come and express themselves and present their opinions, and it's our duty to hear them, not to badger them on issues not relevant to the bill on hand.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** MPP Blais.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** MPP Babikian is accusing members of the opposition of badgering a witness or taking the conversation off a relevant—

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** I didn't accuse anyone.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** Give him a second, MPP Babikian, please.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Let me finish my point of order.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** Let him finish it.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** He's accusing the opposition of badgering the witness or taking it in a direction that's not relevant to the bill. I would like him to demonstrate precisely how exactly that was done.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** MPP Blais, thank you for the point of order, although it's not a valid point of order. At the same time, I will respectfully request that all members make their comments on the bill through the Chair.

Back to you, MPP Babikian.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Thank you very much, Chair.

My question is to Mr. Diodati. Can you please tell us how reforms to regional governance could better help you and your colleagues at the Niagara regional council table to improve efficiency?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Thank you for that question. I think some of them are very obvious low-lying fruit. Right now, we've got 13 chief administrative officers and we've got 13 of everything. They're all making an awful lot of money, most between \$200,000 and \$300,000. I think there's a lot of overlap. We've tried already to have shared fire departments, shared economic development departments, shared chief administrative officers. For whatever reason, it didn't last. We're back to where we were before, 13 silos.

We're not taking advantage of critical mass. We're not taking advantage of critical opportunities like similar bylaws. If you come as a developer to Niagara Falls, when you go to St. Catharines next door, they've got completely different bylaws, and so it goes 13 times. It's very frustrating. And then having regional government gives a whole other set of eyes and filters. It just adds red tape and slows opportunity down.

If you want an example of how not to run a region, you'd look at how we do it.

**Mr. Aris Babikian:** Thank you very much.

I have a question to Regional Councillor Secord. Councillor, I listened to your statement intently when you said that you are supporting these bills knowing that if this bill passes, you will lose your job. I am intrigued to find out more about your decision to support this bill knowing that you are going to lose your job if this is passed.

**Mr. Peter Secord:** Well, I think I'll start that off, sir, by telling you that you probably followed the same routes. I have a business and I have a life, but I got into politics to help the residents in my area and to help make decisions that made sense, first for St. Catharines and then for the Niagara region.

I sat on numerous committees, chaired numerous committees. I've worked on committees when they're above 10 or 12 people; you can't get consensus. You can't get things done.

City council for me was very rewarding. On the opposite side of the room from you, there's an MPP who sat beside me on St. Catharines city council, MPP Burch. We were part of a downtown revitalization. We got an arena built. We got Brock University downtown. We got two-way traffic. We got many things done with a small committee.

I went to the region, and I've been there for four years. I can tell you it's very disappointing to sit there amongst 30-some people and see the antics, see the grandstanding and see the waste of time and the waste of staff resources and all of those things. I quickly realized after two or three years that the only way to have this change was to make a smaller council.

I've done my part, and I would be glad to keep doing my part, but what's right for St. Catharines and Niagara is exactly this, and anybody that's from Niagara knows that. I don't think we should get lost in worrying who those 13 people are at the table; I think we should start to focus on what they can do to remove red tape.

As Mayor Diodati said, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls have two different building departments. There are 13 different permit processes in this area. There's too much going on. I hear from developers who come to St. Catharines and want to do something, and they just shake their head. "I can't go through this. We can't spend this time and money to get things done." It's been going on for years, and it has to stop.

Is this exactly the right thing to do at this point? I think it is. Is it going to be exactly what we need?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** One minute.

**Mr. Peter Secord:** I think we need to give the 13 mayors the opportunity to change things for the better and find another road.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** Thank you. MPP Saunderson.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** I'll stick with you, Mr. Secord. We've heard a lot of discussion today about anti-democratic processes in the appointment of the chair or the warden. Some 80% of the regional councils will be appointing their warden or, in the case of Simcoe county, chair. I just wonder what you would you say in response to that criticism.

**Mr. Peter Secord:** You know what? That's a different region than ours, so I can't criticize that.

One of the things I found out in business—I was in the event management business and the volunteer business—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** Thank you so much. That was the allocated time for this presentation.

MS. LIZ BENNEIAN

MS. NINA DEEB

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** We will be moving over to the next set of presenters. We have in person Ms. Nina Deeb, and we have Ms. Liz Benneian online. Do we have both the presenters? We have them.

1500

Liz, can you hear us? Can you start? You have seven minutes. Please start with the name for the Hansard. Thank you so much.

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** Good afternoon, Chair and committee members. Thank you for allowing me to speak on Bill 100. My name is Liz Benneian. I'm a resident of the town of Lincoln in the region of Niagara.

I believe Bill 100 is deeply flawed and should be discarded for the following reasons. At its very core, it's undemocratic. It flouts hundreds of years of civic tradition that go to the essence of who we are as a people. It enshrines inequality between citizens. The changes are unjustified. And finally, these changes are fostering a belief in citizens that the current government is out of touch with their needs.

The bill is anti-democratic. To maintain democracy, three things are necessary from our leaders: They must earn the right to govern through a democratic process, they must be transparent about the way they conduct the people's business and they must be accountable to the public for their decisions. If the minister, at his own discretion, appoints the foremost leader in Niagara region and then also endows him with strong-chair powers, none of the three pillars of democracy can be met: appointed, not elected; not transparent, as he's guided by the minister; and not accountable to the public but to the minister who appointed him.

It must also be noted that a large portion of the property taxes paid by Niagara residents go to the region. If citizens have no stake in electing their regional leader—a leader who will be imbued with strong-chair powers, including the power to overrule a majority of elected mayors—then that, in effect, is taxation without representation.

This bill must be reviewed in the context of the many moves that the government has made to concentrate power to itself. For instance, school boards have been taken over by the Minister of Education, and the power of elected trustees has been greatly diminished.

Conservation authorities have had much of their authority removed and now will be consolidated and put under the control of a provincial agency.

As well, development decisions that were made locally while adhering to provincial policy are now easily over-written by the province using an unprecedented number of ministerial zoning orders.

Since 2025, the government has even given itself more power in the judge selection process.

And just last week, the government gave itself an invisibility cloak, bypassing the retroactive changes to the freedom of information act that will exempt the Premier, cabinet ministers and their offices from FOI requests.

The changes noted above also politicize roles that traditionally have been neutral such as judges, senior municipi-

pal staff and directors of education, who have been hired or selected for their experience, professionalism and competence in the past, not on their connections to those in power.

Democracy is messy, but that's how democracy works. There are other forms of government that are much more efficient, but I don't think we want to emulate them. Efficiency alone shouldn't be the goal; good governance should be.

The bill enshrines inequality between citizens. What I mean by this is that depending on where they live, Bill 100 gives some citizens a greater right to elect their leaders than others. Why should a citizen in Hamilton, a city that has roughly the same population as Niagara region, be able to vote for their highest-ranking local politician, while I, in Niagara, may have mine appointed by the minister? It is simply not right that the provincial government is creating two classes of citizens, some with more democratic rights than others.

These changes are unjustified. The government has made various claims about why these governance changes are needed, including to expedite housing and infrastructure development and to take decisive action in the face of economic threats. It's true that the housing starts have fallen over the past several years. However, that's largely due to external economic factors like the rising cost of materials, which make new homes unaffordable for much of the potential market.

It's also caused by a mismatch in what developers want to build—mostly single-family homes on greenfield—and what the market needs: rental units, truly affordable starter homes and non-market housing, which higher levels of government must resume responsibility for funding.

Finally, it's hard to understand how appointing a regional chair could expedite housing starts when planning powers have already been stripped from regional governments. If the province is concerned about infrastructure funding, it should stop cutting development charges, which funded, in part, infrastructure needed for growth.

As for the excuse of economic threats, those are best dealt with by the federal government and, to a lesser extent, by the provincial government. The municipalities have only a marginal role to play. It flouts democratic tradition.

These authoritarian changes not only erode the foundations of local democracy; they flout hundreds of years of democratic traditions. In Niagara region, the first municipal council meeting was held on April 5, 1790, at the home of John Green, in the area of Grimsby now known as The Forty. While there has always been some kind of upper-level government, there has also always been—beginning with the area's Indigenous peoples, and later with early settlers—local governance in our province.

While I know that section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms only provides the right for citizens to vote in elections for the House of Commons and the Legislative Assembly, it does enshrine the democratic traditions of our country, and it does reflect the belief and the traditional practice of our citizens that they have the right to vote for their political leaders at all levels of government. That should not be swept aside by an ill-thought-out bill.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** One minute.

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** Citizens' views are disregarded. Citizens in Niagara did not vote in the last provincial election to have a strong chair selected for us by the province. Local people must have a say in the important decisions that impact them. That means real, meaningful consultation needs to take place, and then the people of the community, through an electoral process, should decide what, if any, changes to local governance should occur.

In conclusion, people are looking to the south and seeing what happens when democracy is corroded one pillar at a time, and they are not going to quietly go along with the same thing happening in this province. The bill should be withdrawn. Regional and local autonomies should be maintained. Regions should continue to decide how their leaders are selected. The government of this province should stop its constant meddling in municipal business and get back to doing the work that the people want done: public health care they can count on, properly funded educational systems, and providing the non-market housing that is so desperately needed.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** Thank you so much. Thanks for the presentation.

We will move over to the second presenter. Please start with your name for Hansard, and welcome.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Good afternoon, Chair and committee members. My name is Nina Deeb. I've been a full-time real estate broker for 30 years and I've been a real estate student for 31 years. I read all the legislation.

This is only the second bill that committee has had the opportunity to invite the public to participate in since March of last year. Thank you for the invitation. Please see this important appendix 1, where I have listed the bills. I would like to have been invited to testify or at least comment on all these bills, but I wasn't given the opportunity, other than one.

The minister must refrain from interfering in local governance through an appointment-of-regional-chair process. This has the optics of partisan appointments and undermines the public's trust. This is evident in practice through the real estate sector. I can give you many examples. These appointments are highly inappropriate and none of these partisans are welcome in the real estate sector. The people of Ontario are not responsible for providing high-paying jobs to partisans.

This bill sets up the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to appoint the failed party candidates and loyalists as regional chairs through regulation. The wording throughout the bill states that if there is any conflict with the regulation, with the provisions of this act or any act, that the regulations shall prevail. This is problematic, since the regulation is made in the sole opinion of the minister. Regulations made in the opinion of one person must not prevail over any act.

Furthermore, we do not know what we are agreeing to. Writing blank cheques and finding out later through regulation is not helpful. What's the hurry? Rushing blindly without knowing what we are doing will give us the same regressive results that we have been experiencing. It's all

downhill, which is shown in our housing starts since 2002 and with the parent bill, the strong-mayors act.

The minister already has enough powers and does not use the powers or tools available to enable the housing projects that municipalities have requested through ministerial zoning orders. The minister should be issuing enhanced ministerial zoning orders. Instead, the province issues permits to take water and is the cause of the shutdown of Waterloo region's new home construction due to water capacity constraints. This is economically erosive on Waterloo region. This is my region. Waterloo region is a two-tier municipality, and I am very involved in my local democracy.

1510

When 8,000 homes a year are not built or are not being sold to purchase the new homes that were built, tens of thousands of workers in Waterloo region that need to work are not working. The real estate industry provides snowball employment to multiple industries. We must build homes to keep workers employed. The taps for corporations to take water from my region must be turned off by the province. The minister's opinion is the opinion of just one person. This makes room for errors, prejudices and capture of the law selectively. Delegation of government authority to unelected bureaucrats is a bad idea.

This mirrors the powers that were given through Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act. I had written a delegation recommending that the government not pass that bill in 2022. Fewer homes have been built with these undemocratic changes.

In 1921, Albert E. LePage built a five-room bungalow in just one day. We can build. We have to remove the corporations and the obstacles that are in the way. We have way too much red tape, and this government has been installing tons of red tape.

Furthermore, the home building programs and incentives that are being announced by the federal and provincial governments—Waterloo region would like to participate in these programs. However, with our new home construction being turned off, we do not have access to funding, because they are connected to our housing starts. Building one and a half million homes by 2031: This government is on track to meet 42%. That's what they're going to achieve at this rate.

The change for the minister to appoint heads of council is absolutely not supported. The government must return to holding public hearings on all proposed legislation except for housekeeping bills.

I would love to support this bill, but I do not support it. I would suggest this bill should be abandoned.

I also have here the list of the bills, like I mentioned. Building Homes and Improving Transportation Infrastructure Act: That one is supposed to be going to committee on Monday. I did register; I haven't heard. I actually was only given one day's notice of whether I could come here to testify, and my time was changed. I was originally given less than a day's notice; I was given 23 and a half hours' notice. I do work; this isn't a job for me. I should have been in the meeting this morning, which I didn't attend, and then this afternoon, I had three of my clients—they gracefully changed their schedules and allowed me to do

my appointments yesterday so that I could be here today to speak to you.

Thank you for having me here today. I do appreciate the opportunity, and I do look forward to answering your questions if you have any. Thank you.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** Thank you so much.

At this time we will start the questions, starting with the third party. MPP Blais.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Thank you, ladies, for your presentations. It's very much appreciated.

Ms. Deeb, I'm going to start with you. You mentioned that one of your concerns as it relates to appointing of the chairs and giving them strong-chair powers is that the government might choose to appoint failed Conservative candidates or Conservative insiders—I don't want to put words in your mouth, but something to that effect. So, I guess, does it surprise you to learn that the government arranged for several former Conservative candidates and actually executive members of their political party to testify at committee today?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** No, I'm not surprised. Thank you for the question. I have actually been listening to committee. Furthermore, this has already happened. This happened in Niagara, where a failed candidate was appointed as the chair.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Yes. Thank you for that. Thank you for bringing to the committee's attention the list of bills that have not seen committee debate.

For any of the committee members who are caring to pay attention and not look at their phones, it's found on page 3 of her submission.

The one act besides this one that has gone to committee is Bill 9, the Municipal Accountability Act. Are you aware that following those consultations, which traversed the province and where hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent, the government did not accept any substantial change or amendment following those committee hearings?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Thank you for the question. Yes, that was the only bill that went to committee, and I did testify on that bill.

I find that's common, that at the committee hearings, what witnesses bring to the table is not considered. That's one of the dangers of a majority government.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I presume it's a danger too when committee members sit on their phone the entire time.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** You don't feel like you're being listened to if people are on their phones.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Yes, of course.

The issue with the water situation in Waterloo—I have just been reading up on that. Am I correct in understanding that it's not a water quality issue, but it's just a water capacity issue and, therefore, no new permits can be issued, to your understanding?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** That's correct. What has happened, though, since is that we've had ERO that came out, and there was a permit to take water from Waterloo region which the equivalent of an entire steel water tower in a day. That's what the permit was for, and the permit was to wash gravel.

I did submit comments on that because I don't want to wash gravel. I want to build housing. I want my economy turned back on. I want my housing turned back on in my region.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** This was a quarry operation, I presume, or something to that effect?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Yes.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Yes? Okay. Are you aware of how long it might take to build a new water treatment facility or somehow solve the water quantity problem?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** We don't need to build new; we need to be using what we already have. We're not taking the 20% capacity from the Grand River for one of our water plants. There are two in our region, and we're meant to be taking 20% from the Grand River. That's not happening, and it comes down to money. We don't have the money to keep up the water, to keep up our infrastructure, and we don't have the money to invest in the wells.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** So there's a need to invest in upgrading the water treatment plant that exists to take that additional 20%, and presumably the province isn't providing that funding?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** That's correct. The water coming from the Grand River is actually going straight into circulation, where it's meant to be going into banks until it's needed, when the water level is reduced.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** The lack of that water capacity— as I understood it, the region has now indicated that it will no longer support growth. Municipalities are supporting zoning changes by putting holding symbols on to ensure that billing does not take place until water capacity is issued.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** That's correct, but residential users are the most responsible of all water users. We return 90% of the water that we take, and no other sector does that.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Thank you very much for coming today. I appreciate that.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** No problem.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Ms. Benneian, I'm going to butcher your last name, and I apologize. Benneian? I hope I got that at least moderately close. Thank you as well for your presentation today.

I'm wondering if you could, for us, rearticulate your concern. I see the problem with the chairs issue. There are two aspects of the problem. There's the appointed aspect, which, depending on your point of view, may or may not be a problem because it exists already in Ontario. There is lots of conversation about that, but such is life. Then there's the strong-chair power part of the problem, and other people have their own version of concerns around that.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** One minute.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** The justification for a strong-mayor powers was that the mayor had a city-wide mandate. Obviously, an appointed chair would not have that mandate, so now we're going to combine strong-mayor powers with an unelected chair.

I'll give you the next 30 seconds just to talk about that.

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** I think there's, as I mentioned in my presentation, a great inequality that's being created between some citizens and others. For some citizens, they're

able to elect the highest political person in their area, and others are not. It's just anti-democratic.

**1520**

On the point of strong-chair powers, I don't agree with strong-mayor powers either. I think we've imported another bad idea from the United States. I think that there are plenty of councils that work and have worked perfectly fine for decades with the way they were, without mayors having strong-mayor powers. And a lot of mayors are refusing to use them. They're used to having to work with their councillors and get consensus.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** Thank you so much. That is the time allocated for the third party.

We're moving over to the government. MPP Saunderson, over to you, sir.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Before I start my comments— although I don't usually do this on the political level at a committee meeting when we're just trying to get information. But would it surprise you, to both the delegates—and thank you for coming today and giving us your opinions—that we heard from, today, a failed Liberal leadership candidate in 2019, a failed Liberal candidate from 2018, as well as another delegate today who is a city councillor and was endorsed by the federal Liberal minister. So if the assertion is that what is being said today is for political expediency, I just want you to know that it goes both ways.

My name is Brian Saunderson. I'm the MPP for Simcoe-Grey. Prior to serving on provincial government, I served on Simcoe county council for eight years, and I can tell you that on the restructuring front, it has been a discussion in Simcoe county for about 20 years.

You may not know that during this last round, what's in this legislation was actually requested by Simcoe county. To do that legislative change on their own, it required what was called a triple majority. So it had to pass at county council—which had 32 municipal representatives for the 16 member municipalities, both the mayor and deputy mayor, and they elected their warden from within—and then go back to the lower-tier municipalities. So all 16 councils voted on it. It was passed by a majority of those councils that represent over 50% of the population of Simcoe county, and then it went back to county council, where it failed in a tied vote.

As a result of that, council asked the warden, by resolution, to write to Minister Flack to pass the legislation to reduce county council from 32 to 16 and to add a 17th member, who is a warden not serving on municipal council. They were going to appoint it at county council, but now the province has said, "We will appoint that." So I wanted to give you that context.

We also heard in the delegation before yours from two mayors in Niagara region, as well as a Niagara regional county councillor, who were all advocating for the reduction of councillors. In particular, the regional councillor was basically asking to have his job eliminated.

I would like to start off asking you if you agree with the restructuring of the Simcoe county council and the Niagara regional council down to a reduced number of members with the warden or regional chair.

I'll start with you, Ms. Deeb.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I would agree that any politician that thinks that they are not required should resign. If they think that they bring nothing to the table, we don't need them. But as far as members that are representing us, I don't think we need less representation. I think we need less corporations and less CEOs, less registrars, but as far as having less elected members to represent locally, no. Those are the people that I'm connected to the most. They're actually the people that help me the most with the things that I need, and I don't think we have too many.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Okay.

Ms. Benneian? I hope I said that right. I think you're on mute. Sorry, I think you're on mute.

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** There, they have unmuted me. Okay. Benneian—it's too many vowels at the end.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** I have a similar problem.

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** I'm not opposed to making changes in governance and I'm not opposed to looking at how things are being done now and improving them. What I think we've done a very bad job at is consultation on how to do it. When you only include in that group the people whose jobs are going to be affected by making those changes, you're probably going to have a lot of problems getting agreement about changes.

I look at various committees that I've been on and some of my various work experience where I realized that having more people at the table during consultation is probably a better way to come to some kind of agreement. I would like to see a citizens' forum where you have members who are elected—not all of them, but a select group of elected members—you have some community leaders, you have some citizens. You bring everybody to the table and you give them a limited amount of time—whatever it is, a year, whatever—to talk through what the issues are, what problems you're trying to solve, and how best you can try and solve them to create a more efficient government that is also a good government.

I just think we have done consultation very poorly and we have asked the wrong people to be trying to eliminate their own jobs. I think there is a way to come to governance reform that will give you better governance.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Thank you for that. I think one of the statistics that Mayor Diodati indicated is that in Niagara region, there is one politician for every 4,500 people—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** One minute.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** —whereas in the city of Toronto, or potentially across the province, the number is probably more like one politician for every 800,000 people. In my riding, I have 150,000 people. It's about finding the efficiencies.

In your comments, both of you spoke today about the need for infrastructure to support the type of housing and development that we need. We need jobs as well to fire up the housing. In my riding of Simcoe–Grey, we have Honda in the south end and a lot of big employers in the north. The housing is necessary to house our employees. The jobs are there but we know we have infrastructure pinch points that are very significant. Ms. Deeb mentioned it in Waterloo region. I know you have the same problem with

the regional water supply in Niagara. We have a \$200-billion deficit across the province. Looking at delivery change is a way to allow the governments, both local and regional, to focus on what they need—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Deepak Anand):** Thank you so much, MPP Saunderson. That was all the time allocated on this. We are going to move over to the official opposition. I see MPP Burch.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Thank you both for appearing today. I know it is difficult—especially Nina, showing up in person with 24 hours' notice. That is impressive for a private citizen to be able to do that. And good to see you again, Liz.

I want to start with you, Nina. I really enjoyed your presentation from someone who is out there in the real estate market. I wanted to ask you, first of all, to clear up the fact about municipal politicians, the number of them that we had and the danger of getting rid of our local representation. You hear this talking point, you hear it enough and people start to believe it. But actually, the fact of the matter—and we'll be hearing it from AMO in the next presentation—is Ontario has the lowest number of local politicians of any province in Canada. We are actually trailing the entire country, and we are trying to get rid of them. It's really something.

I also want to address this attempt to equivocate between what other parties and this party are doing in terms of democratic representation. No one has ever tried to have appointed chairs who have undemocratic superpowers. No one has ever done that—no other party. This is the first time ever. It's completely undemocratic. To try to say that everybody does it, we all know that's not true. This is kind of a first. I wanted to give you a chance to just talk about that and the importance of local democratic representation.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Thank you for the question. The local representatives are also the lowest paid. They don't make a lot of money. People think that you can just quit your job and be a local. They are the lowest paid. They do a lot of work. I find, in my involvement for over 30 years, I get quick responses. I am very satisfied. Even my Waterloo region chair, she is fantastic. I've gone to delegations; I've presented to her. She is polite. I want to vote for my chair.

From the perspective of what we don't need—this isn't something that we don't need, and it's not expensive, either. We're not spending a lot of money on these politicians. That's nonsensical to say that we don't need these people. This is the best representation that we actually have, and the most used.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Thank you for pointing it out—I thought it was brave to point out in a really upfront way this trend of having party hacks and failed candidates appointed to these positions.

1530

In Niagara, you may be aware we had three mayors—two of them appeared already—who were campaigning for the Conservative government during the last election, using their position as mayor to campaign for the Conservatives. Then they appointed a failed candidate who ran against my friend here from Niagara Falls as the chair,

who then went out and joined those three mayors to try and force amalgamation upon Niagara. Then the chair had to resign in humiliation because they weren't adequately qualified for the job.

These are the dangers that we face in this road that we're going down here. We hear from some mayors who say appointed chairs and strong-mayor powers actually slow things down. I think you kind of talked about that a little bit, that it can actually make things more complicated and cause fights among council when the mayor tries to supersede a democratically elected council.

Do you want to comment on how this could cause things to actually slow the housing market?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** When people don't know the case they need to meet or what to expect, they—even builders. Builders have been given incentives to build, but ultimately interest rates across Canada are really the problem. The interest rates went up so fast—they went up 10 times in a row—and the land had already been purchased, so that created a big problem. All of a sudden, they didn't pencil out projects—they didn't pencil out anymore—so projects were not built.

As far as the local governance and the strong-mayor powers, the strong-chair powers, I really enjoyed what Niagara did. I don't watch any TV, but I did watch that, with what happened, because it was very entertaining.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** That's true.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** It was like watching true crime, only it was happening right here. I did enjoy that.

But that sent Niagara into chaos. I don't see that that was productive. I think that that just really sent Niagara into chaos, and when there's chaos, no one is going to want to invest or build.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Yes, true crime; I'm going to have to remember that one.

Liz, maybe you want to comment on some of that? Also, you pointed out in your presentation, the provincial government has downloaded so much responsibility and that the municipal government doesn't have the tools to deal with it. Actually, over \$100 million of the regional budget is things that the provincial government is responsible for that they've downloaded onto municipalities who are struggling, and then we hear these Conservative mayors talking about tax increases. Well, they don't have the money to cover provincial responsibilities that the province is asking them to pay for.

Did you want to comment on that?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** I'll comment on both things.

I'm not in agreement that we should just be getting rid of councillors for no reason. I agree that municipal councillors do a lot of good work and they're important to their citizens. The excuse was made that, "You have so many councillors. You have too many councillors there," as if that somehow was affecting the budget, when we all know what the biggest expenses are in municipal and regional budgets. And it's not the councillors. As—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you very much. The time is up for this round.

We will start the second round. We will start with the third party. MPP Blais.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Liz, why don't you just finish your last thought there.

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** We know it's things like transportation and water and waste water at the regional level; it's not councillor salaries. And at the local level, it's the same kind of thing.

When it comes to the downloading of responsibilities onto the municipalities, what you said is very true. I know we're building a new hospital here and the municipalities are having to fund a good portion of it, and that's a great example of downloading and funding. Housing is another great example.

So we do need the provincial government to pay for what it's supposed to pay for, and that would relieve some of the pressure on the local municipalities.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Thank you for that, Liz.

I'm just looking at the city of Niagara Falls website right now. It's saying that in the last election, in the 2022 election, voter turnout was 27.53%, which is not even the one third, which we often cite as kind of municipal voter turnout.

I'm wondering what your thought is, if people know that the people that they vote for as mayor can be overruled by an unelected political appointee with a couple of other mayors. The chair plus six votes, I think, is going to get you anything passed in this new configuration. What do you think that that might do to voter turnout?

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** I think it can only have a negative effect on it. It can only make a bad situation even worse.

I think there is a pervasive problem of people feeling like they're not being listened to by the higher levels of government, by especially the provincial government, and I'll give you a great example: the conservation authorities. It's my understanding that 97% of the people who made comments on the consolidation of the conservation authorities said they didn't want it, and for many good reasons, and yet that was totally ignored and the province is consolidating the conservation authorities. It's those kinds of things that make people feel like they have no say, and in a democracy, we should have a say.

I'm just going to briefly say, I lived in Germany from 1985 to 1990 working for the Canadian Forces. I went to the Soviet Union when it was still the Soviet Union, and I went to East Germany when it was still East Germany. I've seen how some other forms of government work—or don't work—and I don't want to see our democracy eroded in this country. I don't want to see appointed people who should be elected by the people. So I think we have to be very cautious about these kinds of changes that are erosions to democracy.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Thank you for that. I was not aware, so thank you very much for your service as well.

Ms. Deeb, you're a real estate agent. I was speaking to a real estate agent in Orléans over the weekend, and he was articulating to me that a major consequence of recent announcements about HST rebates on new home construction is that the resale market is actually being crushed, that people who bought their homes in 2022, 2023 etc. are effectively at this point priced out of the market. Is that

something you're experiencing on the resale market where you're from?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Yes. Anyone that bought around 2021, 2022, most can't even sell because they owe more than what they could sell for. These properties are being sold by auction rather than coming to the market on MLS, so that changes affordability and how people can purchase them because the end users are not a complicated buyer.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I've also heard that people who had homes under contracts—say you buy a brand-new house in March, your dream home; it's going to be ready in September or maybe March of next year—are not actually benefiting from the HST rebate because of the timing of everything. Is that something that you've experienced yet?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I understand from what I'm hearing that consumers are cancelling their contracts and rewriting them. What the government should be doing is taking the change retroactively in order to avoid this because it's a form of tax evasion. It's just like if you announce something that could save somebody \$100,000 and then you say, "Oh, you bought your house last week. Well, that's too bad," because the builder could cancel the contract and you could just enter a new contract.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Because the builder can cancel the contract effectively almost at any time and it's much harder for the purchaser to do that?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Yes. The purchaser does not have the rights that the developers have in those contracts. They're huge contracts. They're developer-driven-and-written contracts.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** So from a point of view of getting more houses built and saving people more money, would it be more appropriate that that provision come into effect at the date of closing as opposed to the arbitrary start date? That way, everyone who had a contract would benefit from the savings.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Yes. That would be much more beneficial, and it would also not, again, create so much chaos—because it has created chaos, where buyers and developers are like, "What do we do? What do we do with this?"

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** From a market perspective, for the next year, just say this does accelerate new home construction—which we think it might—but it actually depresses resale of existing stock because of the price problems that you've already articulated. Do you think we'll actually end up with a net benefit as a result?

1540

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** No, I don't think so.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Yes, okay, thank you very—

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** I don't think it's going to be beneficial.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I appreciate it.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** We move to the government side.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Somebody has to get off the phone to ask questions.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Anand.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you, MPP Gates, for taking care of everyone.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** You're welcome.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Nina, it's nice to see you. It's always a pleasure talking to you. You've been a big advocate for housing. Seven minutes of straight talk on housing crisis—straight to the point, right?

So quick question: I just want to talk about something because you've been in real estate for such a long period of time. What have you seen in terms of the growth in the last 30 years, but more so in the last 10 years? In terms of population, in terms of need, what do you see happening on the earth, in your region and across Ontario?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Thank you for the question. That's a great question.

I've actually written a study regarding generational housing affordability. What has happened is the formulas are no longer working for the incomes of families. So families are having to rent and they're renting for 20, 25 years. That's how long it takes to save a down payment for a house with the current system.

We could be creating programs to assist people to get these vacant homes sold. We need financial programs for first-time home buyers or end users trying to get into these homes. There are 37,000 vacant homes in Ontario. We should be selling them, and we need to make them financially viable for consumers to buy them.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** We were looking at the data and we saw the—simply, I'm talking about Peel region, for an example. In the year 2000, we were less than a million. Today, we are more than 1.6 million. In 2025, we'll be more than 1.5 million. So there is unprecedented growth.

In fact, sorry: Now, we are at about 1.3 million, 1.4 million. In another 25 years, it's going to be over 2.3 million, 2.5 million.

So thinking ahead, looking today—because it's not magically going to appear, those housings, the interest; that just not going to happen by itself. So what's your take on the infrastructure, like waste water, water system and the infrastructure that will be needed for building those houses for the next generation? I'm sure, we may or may not be around by that time, but our kids and our grandkids will be around there. What's your take on that?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Thank you for the question. My response to that is the federal government and the provincial government must write us cheques for water and infrastructure, because that's where the money used to come from. We never had to fund this locally. It was not through development charges.

Development charges are a result of the province and the federal government not making the transfers that they used to make. It's having to be funded locally and it's increasing property taxes. Bill 23 increased the property taxes of everybody across Ontario.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** This is where I always look at it. I was talking to a group of students a couple days back and we said, "We are a generation—we've seen pencil and paper to AI, within one lifespan." What was 30, 40 years back is today very different. Speed, in terms of the need—

they're very different today. And that's why somewhere in this bill, where we talk about the better regional governance, it's talking about special Niagara Falls for an example: so many politicians.

At this point, Liz, if I can take your help on this conversation—I agree there has to be a balance, and absolutely, the balance is always the key. But do you think having that many politicians does not slow down the much-needed decision-making at this point, especially when we know it's all about speed that nowadays? Thankfully we have computers, thankfully we have data, we have those tools who can help us to analyze the information much faster compared to 30, 40, 50 years back. What is your take on that?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** You're muted. We cannot hear you.

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** Sorry, they're slow unmuting me. I can't unmute myself.

I don't see having a number of councillors around a local council table as being a problem. I don't see that they're really holding things up. I can see other issues that might be holding things up: the lack of infrastructure to support growth, the lack of money for that infrastructure.

I can look at my own local council. It's pretty efficient in the way it runs. It's meeting its provincial growth targets, and many other councils could say the same. So I don't see the number of councillors as being the issue.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** There may be other ways to make government efficient, but I don't see just having a number of councillors being the problem.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Chair, how much time do I have?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** About 53 seconds.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** I don't have enough time, I guess.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** And 50 seconds now.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** I'm not going to have another question, I guess, because there won't be enough time for the answer.

I just want to take a moment to thank both of the presenters for coming and advocating. Liz, it's really good to see your work on the advocacy of the environment. That's so good to see, thinking about the community, working for the community, so I really want to say thank you to you for that. And Nina, it's always a pleasure to see you. Thank you for your advocacy. Thank you so much.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, MPP Anand. The time is up for the government side.

We move now to the official opposition. MPP Gates.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** First of all, I want to say to the two presenters: You guys did an amazing job. I'm going to start with Nina, and then I'll go to Liz.

Nina, we sat for 16 days this year—16 days. It's May 1. There's a problem with the government. There is a problem when you say you've tried. You take a look at the list you gave us that haven't come to this committee. And then every time when you get close, now we're going to break in another

month and go off until—last year was until the middle of October.

They keep saying to us, "Well, we don't have time to have committees." Well, if you actually sat at Queen's Park during the year, we would be able to have talented people like yourself that are passionate and care about not only their province and their country but their community. You would be able to come to these committees so we can hear and see that passion.

So that's the message we've got to get to the government: These things are good for democracy. With this bill, they don't believe in democracy. They believe in control and power and not necessarily what's best for a community.

I just wanted to say this quick; not really a question—I guess it is a question, maybe: Would you ever consider running for an elected position?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Thank you for the question. I have been asked, and I really am not interested. When I look at the people that do put their names forth for the chair of a region, that that's going to be cancelled by this bill, I look and I think it's so difficult for people to put their names on a ballot and actually make that sacrifice.

But for me, I like my privacy and I like my life the way that it is. I would not consider putting my name on a—

**MPP Wayne Gates:** And I don't have time to talk about all the problems we have with housing and the affordability crisis that we're in, so I'm going to go to Liz. I've always admired your work from a distance. I know I haven't gone for coffee or anything with you, but I have followed you quite extensively. You've been a leader on this issue in Niagara. You've organized a number of demonstrations to support local decision-making. Can you speak to the confusion this government's changed process has caused?

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** Well, it's caused a great deal of confusion in Niagara because so many different things happened. I mean, we can go back to the last election where, in the middle of the election, the province changed the rules. We were going to directly elect our regional chair, and the province came in once the election had already started and said, "No, we're not having an elected chair. We're going to appoint."

So there's been constant confusion around our elections in Niagara: the appointment of Gale and then him having to leave and then talking about amalgamation. Municipalities started to have community meetings to talk to their citizens about amalgamation to start consultations, and before that was even done, they said, "No, we're not going to have amalgamation. We're going to have an appointed chair."

**1550**

It's just been constant—really—constant confusion. That's not helping anybody, and I'm sure it's not helping businesses that are thinking about doing business here, when there's such constant swirl around our elected processes.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** That kind of falls right into my next question, by the way. As someone who is not a government insider—you're not a government insider, are you?

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** No.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Did you ever have a chance to read the 2019 Seiling-Fenn report that the government has never released?

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** No, because the government has never released it. But many people have wanted to see it.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Do you believe it should be released?

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** Yes.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Do you know how it was paid?

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** Oh, I'm sure it was paid by tax dollars. Therefore, it should be a public document.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Yes. And it should be released. You're in full agreement with that?

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** Full agreement with that.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Do you agree with that too, Nina? I think yes.

In your opinion—this is important. You've talked about it too, and extremely well, by the way. Is there any comparison—the two of you can answer, if you like. In your opinion, is there any comparison between the savings that Niagara will achieve by eliminating a few councillors and the cost of the downloading by the province of Ontario?

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** No comparison. There is no comparison—

**MPP Wayne Gates:** There is no comparison. Nina—

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** And when you look at what happened in other municipalities, just for example, in Hamilton, they eliminated some of their councillors and then they just hired more staff to help their councillors with their councillor duties. So it turned out to be a wash, and studies have shown that.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Yes, and you're right there. Do you want to say anything? Go ahead.

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Yes, I had mentioned that Bill 23 downloaded billions of dollars; the province downloaded billions of dollars onto local taxpayers through Bill 23. So that happened. That occurred.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Did they have consultation on Bill 23?

**Ms. Nina Deeb:** Yes, they did. I wasn't invited, but I did send in a written submission.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** You did. Good for you. What kind—

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** Could I mention something? Sorry. Could I mention something else?

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Sure, you can do whatever you want. Go ahead.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** You've got a minute. Go ahead.

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** In answer to your question about what this confusion is causing in Niagara, one of the things that it's led to is demonstrations. The first big demonstration, there were 300 people out on the street, and even last Saturday in the pouring rain and the cold and the wind, there were 200 people on the street protesting against the current government.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I was there.

**Ms. Liz Benneian:** It has gotten people upset, is really what's happened. And if we had good weather, I bet you there would have been 600 people there.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Liz, I know you don't know that I was there; I looked like a drowned rat. It was pouring rain and I didn't have an umbrella. On my social media, I look like I'm 110 years old. My hair is down like here. But there were a lot of seniors there that care passionately about health care, and they were standing in the cold and the rain with me.

To your point, that's exactly what's happened, and it's going to get bigger and bigger, specially with the FOIs and health care and education. But thank you very much, both ladies, for coming. I think my mike is off. Sorry. I didn't realize—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you very much. That's the time allotted for this panel. Thank you very much for both witnesses for coming and sharing your opinions and insights with us.

COUNTY OF SIMCOE  
ASSOCIATION OF MUNICIPALITIES  
OF ONTARIO  
MR. SAL SORRENTO

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** We will just move to our final panel of the day, and I would like to invite the county of Simcoe, Association of Municipalities of Ontario and Sal Sorrento. Thank you very much for all our witnesses. We will start with Basil Clarke from the county of Simcoe. Please identify yourself, and you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am Basil Clarke, the warden of Simcoe county. I am very honoured to be here today. Thank you for allowing me to speak.

I want to speak on Bill 100. First, I want to speak in favour of parts of it and some concerns we have at Simcoe county. I have four things I would like to discuss. I want to share the unique characteristics of Simcoe county and how we differ from many of the regions.

Firstly, I want to thank you for passing Bill 100 and the 17. This is something we have been working on—as, MPP Saunderson, you said earlier—for 20 years and it has been ongoing. So you can imagine politicians sitting at a table and actually voting to eliminate their jobs. Well, that's what we did. We looked at how many we needed to make Simcoe county work properly and efficiently. It's not how many want to be there. It's not how many are entitled to be there. It's how many we actually need for that county to operate efficiently and 16 was the number: a mayor from each community. We did that. We also recognized the important need for a full-time warden. It's a warden that is dedicated to Simcoe county, not to any one of the local municipalities, which is why we formulated it the way it did.

I am currently appointed. I am not elected. I am one of the 32 mayors and deputy mayors that sit at county council. We appoint our leader, our warden. We wanted to

continue with that; only, when we appointed a warden this time, we did not want them to be a mayor, deputy mayor, a councillor at one of the local levels, because we don't want our loyalties split.

I look at my calendar even this week: I have got meetings, places I need to be for Simcoe county. At the same time, my home community wants me here; they want me there. We do not want that split in loyalty. We need the warden to truly represent Simcoe county. And especially in these election years where, if you want to get re-elected as your local mayor, where does your loyalty start to lie?

So we did set it to the triple majority. The floor of county council passed it 17-15. We understood the importance. We wanted it. It failed the triple majority. It was actually—I hate to correct you on this, Brian—eight communities in favour, eight opposed. It was a tie vote. It came back to the house. That is why we have asked you here at the ministry to approve—and I have got it written down here—I believe it's 7119-25, which is the bill for reducing our council, because we understood the importance of it.

Secondly, we are very different. That brings us to the next concern about the province appointing the warden. We do have some concerns with that. We are very unique in Simcoe county. We have it all. We have large auto manufacturing, some of the largest in Ontario, and when the new Honda expansion takes place, the largest in the country. We also have a huge agriculture industry, a huge tourism industry, many mom-and-pop stores that you have come to know and love, and some urban centres. That is very unique, with 16 municipalities that are so different from each other, varying in size and in their primary industry.

Our concern is we want to make sure the warden can represent all of those communities and understand them and know them. That was in our bill 7119, where we wanted to make sure it was a local that was chosen with some political experience that could represent all of county council.

That also brings our concerns a little bit with the strong-warden powers. We are not sure how that formula works out, because we do have a weighted vote now. It's always been in existence. It was part of our bill that we passed where the weighted vote for each community was based on how many electorates there are in that community. I am not sure where a strong warden fits into that.

When we decided to go with the full-time warden's position, we were actually going to give him the least amount of voting power, so it would be equal to the smallest community. Because under the Legislation Act, the warden does have a vote, so we wanted it to be the smallest vote around the table so that you truly were taking your direction from your peers.

As we move forward, I want to highlight, in your Bill 100, it does say "may" appoint. We certainly understand the importance of why you are concerned with who the warden is. I have a billion-dollar budget now: \$750,000 on the operating and over half of that money comes from the province of Ontario for running the many partnerships we have, whether that be paramedic services, long-term care, social housing, the homeless strategy. It's flow-through money, so we understand your concern. You want to make sure you're keeping an eye on that kind of investment.

However, I will remind everyone that Simcoe county is very efficient at delivering those services. In fact, the city of Barrie even had a consultant come and look because they purchase those services from us, both the separate cities of Barrie and Orillia. We provide those regional services to the entire area and the studies showed that we were very, very efficient at Simcoe county. They were getting one of the best deals in the province of Ontario. So I guess what I would say today is it isn't broke. We definitely want to downsize.

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We would like you to at least delegate the authority back to Simcoe county to choose our own warden going forward, certainly understanding that if there's a time that we go and, for a lack of a better word, sideways or off track when it comes to building homes—we certainly understand why the province wants the authority to step in and say, "Hey, hang on, guys. You're not following provincial mandates. We're putting a lot of money and a lot of investment in your community and we need you to do that."

I'll wrap up with that. I won't use my whole seven minutes, but I am looking forward to hearing questions afterwards. Thank you again.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Our next presenter is the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. We have two representatives, Lindsay Jones—she's here in the room—and Alicia Neufeld. She's by Internet, or Zoom. Go ahead. Please identify yourself.

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** I am Lindsay Jones. I'm the executive director at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, known as AMO. As you said, I'm joined by Alicia Neufeld, associate director of policy.

AMO and the 444 municipalities we represent are committed to working with the province to deliver strong, effective local governance. Local democracy is the engine of community life. It's the most direct and accountable way for residents to shape the world they live in. Our neighbourhoods should be guided by the people who call them home. Strong local governance turns collective vision into reality, fostering a sense of belonging, ensuring that progress is rooted in local values and priorities. When we champion vibrant municipal democracy, we aren't just protecting a system. We're empowering the local leadership and diverse voices necessary to build a resilient, self-determined future for every community in Ontario.

Bill 100 cannot be considered in isolation. The changes proposed in this bill come against a backdrop of ongoing provincial action in areas of municipal jurisdiction that serve to undermine municipal authority and centralize decision-making at the province. We're united in wanting all orders of government to work efficiently and effectively in the best interests of their residents. Some targeted governance changes may help further this goal but only if they're designed with local voice. A successful path forward relies on the province setting clear objectives, providing the right implementation supports and conducting the local consultation necessary to make the changes successful.

In this context, AMO is advancing four recommendations to help the government meet its goal.

One: Keep the selection of regional chairs and county wardens local. The combination of provincially appointed heads of council with strong-chair powers is fundamentally undemocratic. It erodes the ability for local residents to hold their elected officials to account and elect people who care about their priorities.

The introduction of strong-mayor powers has been divisive, with strong opinions on both sides. We at AMO continue to be concerned that some of these powers undermine the collaborative nature of municipal government that has long been a strength of our system. Allowing heads of council to make law with the support of just one third of council runs counter to fundamental democratic principles. Similarly, allowing the head of council to hire and fire the heads of departments and reorganize municipal administration is at odds with good corporate governance.

For the first time, Ontario voters will have the chance, this October, to choose the heads of council they think will best wield those powers. But if this bill passes, voters will have no say in the provincially appointed strong chairs making critical decisions on their behalf. That is a fundamental difference between the strong-mayor powers granted to elected mayors and those proposed for appointed regional chairs.

On how regional chairs are selected, we have significant concerns with the provincial government's preference to centralize that authority. AMO prefers municipal leaders to be elected by their communities. Unlike provincial appointments, this keeps heads of council directly accountable to local voters. If the province, however, moves forward with appointed heads of council, we ask that regional councils instead be empowered to appoint a chair from among their own elected members. This model is already standard practice across counties. Appointing a regional strong chair in this manner combines the collaborative strengths of peer selection, where the leader is vetted by fellow mayors, with the authority to drive regional growth. This structure strikes a practical balance. It provides the tools for decisive regional action while maintaining direct accountability to local constituents.

The second theme is to empower municipalities to determine their own composition. The number of councillors at the table impacts the effectiveness of a council and the ability to represent residents. Too many members of council can slow decision-making, and too few dilutes the voices of residents. We agree it is good practice for municipalities to regularly review council composition and listen to residents to determine if there is a need to change the number of elected officials.

At the same time, at a ratio of almost 4,000 residents per councillor, Ontario's municipal elected officials represent more residents than councillors in every other province except for British Columbia. This is triple the national average for council representations. Arbitrarily reducing the number of council members without local input or consent only serves to increase this ratio, undermining the important work councils are already doing to deliver efficient, effective decision-making.

For these reasons, we support the proposed requirement for regional councils to review council composition following an election.

The third theme: Leave weighted voting to local communities that best understand local needs. Bill 100 would provide the minister with reg-making authority to unilaterally determine weighted voting in the regions and county prescribed.

AMO believes that local councils are best-positioned to determine how and when to use weighted voting. At the same time, because needs and priorities vary across lower-tier municipalities, regions and counties, we understand that weighted voting requires careful application to avoid creating unfair advantages or disadvantages between neighbouring communities. If the province chooses to move forward with a mandatory weighted-voting framework, it's critical that open and transparent engagement occur with each community beforehand to ensure community understanding and buy-in.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** Finally, our fourth recommendation is for the government to pass legislation reforming municipal codes of conduct. Maintaining ethical behaviour and respectful discourse are at the heart of public trust and the ability of councils to make effective, collaborative decisions for residents.

Code-of-conduct legislation is especially important in context with the decision to appoint heads of council. As Premier Ford and successive Ministers of Municipal Affairs and Housing have said, elections are the mechanism for voters to remove members of council from office if they have lost public trust. If Bill 9 is not passed and regional heads of council become provincial appointments, hundreds of thousands of Ontarians will have no ability to hold their regional chairs accountable. We're encouraged that Minister Flack has committed to passing that important legislation before this October's municipal election.

In closing, while AMO supports the intended outcomes of this legislation, we remain concerned that it is the next in a series of decisions that continues to remove authority from local officials—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you very much. The time is up.

We now move to our third and final presenter of this panel, who will join us virtually. Mr. Sorrento, the floor is yours. Please identify yourself and your title. You have seven minutes.

**Mr. Sal Sorrento:** Good afternoon, Chair. My name is Sal Sorrento, and I'm a regional councillor for the city of St. Catharines.

In St. Catharines, we are facing the same pressures that communities across Niagara are experiencing: an acute housing shortage, aging and strained infrastructure, the need to attract and retain jobs in a changing economy. Everyday residents are not asking for more politicians; they're asking for faster, clearer decisions and visible progress.

We currently have 32 regional councillors on regional council. Bill 100 recognizes the reality and proposes a

streamlined regional council made up of 12 local mayors and one chair. I will definitely support this. This will be a much more focused—laser-focused—body representing the public.

During my time on regional council and eight years as a former city councillor, I've seen promising projects in housing and infrastructure slowed by the sheer complexity of our decision-making process. Reports circulate through committees. Debates are repeated, so reports go to committees, go to council and then are deliberated under the minutes if councillors don't agree with this. Bill 100 aims to reduce this drag so that when we identify a priority, we can move faster from discussion to action.

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The focus of this legislation on housing and infrastructure is exactly where it needs to be. We hear from young people, Chair; they can't afford housing. We know that seniors looking to downsize can't afford the rents. We know that our roads, water systems and community facilities need ongoing investment and renewal. They demand a regional response that is coordinated, timely and aligned with provincial efforts.

A key element of Bill 100 is the strengthening of leadership at the regional level through a more clearly empowered chair. I understand this could raise some questions. People want an assurance that local perspectives will not be lost. A strong regional chair working with mayors, who themselves are directly accountable to the public and to the residents, can create a better balance. This bill helps address long-standing issues of public understanding. When I speak to residents, Chair, they're not sure what a regional councillor does, sometimes what a city councillor does, what the higher orders of government members are doing, so this is something that can make it much better for Niagara and for our community.

Some may argue that reducing the number of regional representatives risks narrowing the range of voices at the table. I know that local councils and mayors are deeply connected with their communities; they're seen everywhere at events. Last night, the city of St. Catharines had a nearly six-hour meeting with almost 15 delegations, so voices will be heard.

Chair, as a regional councillor who supports this bill, I'm not doing so lightly. It means acknowledging the way we have always done things is no longer adequate for the challenges that lie ahead. It means accepting that some of the rules and structures we are familiar with may need to change so that our residents get better and faster results.

The reasons why I support this bill:

(1) It improves accountability. With a smaller council, residents can more easily see who is making the decisions on major regional issues and evaluate those decisions at election time.

(2) It improves efficiency.

(3) It improves alignment among the communities, the region and the province.

I support Bill 100 because I believe it puts the interests of the people of St. Catharines and all Niagara residents

ahead of the interests of any individual office-holder. It offers a more agile, more understandable and more accountable and efficient regional government, focused where it matters most: on building homes, maintaining and improving infrastructure and delivering value for taxpayers.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you to all of the presenters.

We will move now to two rounds of questioning. We will start the first round with the government side, and you have six and a half minutes. MPP Saunderson.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** I want to thank each of our presenters for coming today, taking time in your busy schedules to be here. You are our last presenters, so we have the benefit of hearing from those prior to you. But also, it's an interesting panel because we have a Niagara regional councillor, we have the warden of Simcoe county and we have the executive director of AMO here that speaks for all 444 municipalities.

I'm going to start with you, Warden Clarke. We served together, for full disclosure, for eight years on county council. The discussion, as you indicated in your comments, is not new at county council. The dynamic there over time, with the 32 versus the 16—and at one point there was a resolution to actually increase it to 33: the 32, plus an independent warden or somebody who is not elected to get above the accusation of local partisanship.

I'm wondering if you can just give us some examples, in your experience, which I think is over 20 years now, Basil—

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** Yes, 20 years.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** And you hardly have any grey hair.

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** Yes.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Just talk about your observations over time. I think the elephant in the room here—and I think you referred to this in your comments, Lindsay—is that we're under huge pressures to get infrastructure in the ground, to get housing going so that we can house our residents because of the fallout of all of what we're seeing from the economy—and it's been a topic all day long. But I want to drill down on understanding the evolution of this legislation and how we are trying to move forward by speeding up approvals and by trying to smooth and streamline processes to get permits and get housing going, but also to get the infrastructure going.

That's a long, convoluted question, Warden, but if you could just talk about your frustrations and observations about how this issue has become more acute as we've experienced this housing crisis and what's going on in the world.

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** You did mention at one time we talked about 33 full-time wardens, increasing. Quite frankly, it was public pushback that adding councillors to the table was not the way to go; reducing was. When we had our public meeting on bill 7119, the overwhelming majority was in favour of downsizing the council. That came from the public themselves, so we've gone that direction.

The frustration, of course, right now is infrastructure. It's still at the local, municipal level, 16 municipalities,

some—Ramara, where I'm from—with a population of 10,000, some as small as 6,000. They just do not have the funding or the tax base to get those projects where they need to go.

I look at my home municipality. I've approved almost enough houses to double the population. But they're not getting built because the infrastructure is not there, and I do not have the bankroll to bring them there.

The majority of the municipalities now are in favour of those services being uploaded to the regional level and with some kind of a regional planning structure. I know you've been discussing Simcoe county planning, whether there needs to be planning at that level. With 16 municipalities, I have a few municipalities that do not have a planner right now. Simcoe county is offering the services for those smaller municipalities.

We're very unique, because we have Bradford, Innisfil and New Tecumseth to the south with booming populations, and then we have small municipalities to the north that aren't looking to grow. They're in ag country—or aggregate, even, so you don't want a large population around your quarries—and so they can't afford to have the staff or the expertise online.

So I see those services being uploaded to Simcoe county kind of under one umbrella, and we need a planning department of some sort. We certainly don't want to see duplication in the planning, but we need somebody to organize how those services are going to roll out and the best use for the dollars across the entire region.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Thank you for that.

Going to you, Mr. Sorrento: As a regional councillor, you're here actually advocating for the elimination of your job. You talked a bit about some of your frustrations at the Niagara regional council. Maybe you could just give us some examples about how you see that impacting not just the residents of St. Catharines but also the region.

**Mr. Sal Sorrento:** Thank you—through you, Chair, to the member. Yes, I am not advocating for my job, but it doesn't mean that I don't care for my community. I deeply care. The work is very, very serious. I'll continue to work hard.

I think that by reducing the number of councillors, it will make it much, much more efficient, Chair—through you to the member. I know there are a couple of major projects that have been held up because it's been the will of council to not rezone or just because things have taken time, a couple of years. If we were to have a smaller council, I believe maybe that might not be the case. Maybe some of these projects would have been approved and moved along much faster.

Through the Chair to the member: Does that answer your question?

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Yes, that's very helpful. Thank you.

Chair, how much time is there?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** One minute, okay. I'm running out of time here.

We have Bill 98 coming up for public consultations next week. There's been a lot of talk about service delivery. Just in the short time we have left, regional governments are very involved in service delivery regionally.

I know at Simcoe, the 16 member municipalities have been doing it. But having said that, there's a huge shortfall in Simcoe county alone. I think you've received eight or nine very significant HEWS fundings and safety funding as well, probably in excess of half a billion dollars, \$500 million?

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Yes. It's a problem going forward, and so I guess the discussion I'd like to have—maybe in the next round—is just, how does that sit on the municipal table, where you have to asset-management plan, you have to put the services in the ground, and then you've got to balance that with DCs and tax rates. Is there a way you could shift that burden to a municipal services corporation?

How much time do we have?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Sixteen seconds.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Sixteen seconds, so I think we'll leave that to the next round. Thank you.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you very much.

We move to the official opposition. MPP Burch.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Thank you to all the presenters. I appreciate your opinions today.

I want to focus my questions for AMO. I've been the municipal affairs critic for the official opposition since 2018, when I was elected.

I really appreciate the fact—you're very diplomatic in your presentation, but you said that "Bill 100 cannot be considered in isolation. The changes proposed in this bill come against a background of ongoing provincial action in areas of municipal jurisdiction that ... undermine municipal authority and centralize decision-making at the province."

And I do think that's an understatement, but I appreciate that you're raising the fact that—what municipalities are telling me all the time is that they wish the province would stop interfering in municipal jurisdiction and start doing their own job in terms of paying for provincial responsibilities, instead of the constant downloading.

**1620**

Ironically, the one bill—my friend from Ottawa and I have both put in private members' bills on this—Bill 9, on municipal accountability that you mentioned, has not come forward, and we're on the verge of a municipal election.

So I'm wondering if you could just comment on: Whether you're a municipality or a business, long-term predictability and some confidence in the partners that you're working with is pretty important—how does this undermine municipal jurisdiction to have this constant interference in jurisdiction?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** Thank you so much for the question.

You're absolutely right that certainty and stability is the foundation of solid, long-term decision-making, both at the municipal level where municipalities are making multi-billion-dollar decisions that will last for 50 years or whether you're a business that is also looking to make decisions with respect to how to allocate your resources.

AMO has worked collaboratively with the Ontario Home Builders' Association around the many changes in the development charges—

*Interjections.*

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** May I interrupt you for a second?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** Yes.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Please, committee members, if you're going to talk to each other, please keep your voice on a lower level so that we can hear the witness.

Go ahead.

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** Thank you so much.

I was just saying that both AMO and the home builders' association have worked together to criticize and to call attention to the challenges that have been created by the multiple changes to both the Planning Act and the Development Charges Act over the past number of years.

Without certainty, there is no ability to plan and to make investments, which, of course, accomplishes the opposite of the goal that both municipalities and the province are looking for when it comes to growth and housing.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** The other thing I was glad that you brought up—and this is often forgotten in our conversations. You say that:

“Allowing heads of council to make law with the support of just one third of council runs counter to fundamental democratic principles behind majority rule. Similarly, allowing the head of council to hire and fire the heads of departments and reorganize municipal administration is at odds with good corporate governance....”

I did a couple of terms in St. Catharines, on council, and because of my background in human resources, I was often called on to be on hiring committees. So I helped hire two CAOs and three or four senior department heads through that process. And if you do it properly, according to best practices, you end up hiring somebody that—of course, you don't want the mayor to be at odds with who you hire, so they kind of have a bit of a veto power. But you would have councillors—some democratic representation; you would have other department heads; you would have, sometimes, a consultant; the mayor is always there, and together you make a decision and then there's confidence in that decision, because it's done professionally and according to best practices.

We had a fiasco, you may remember it, in Niagara. What was it called? “All the Chair's Men”—a group of folks that got elected hired a friend as the CAO, and then they went and started hiring people, and it was a complete disaster. I just shudder to think of an appointed government hack or former candidate that gets appointed as a chair, and then goes out and starts hiring. These are really important,

high-paid positions that are in charge of spending millions of dollars.

Can you just kind of outline the importance of this being done according to best hiring practices, and the dangers of the system that they're putting in place with strong-chair appointed chairs?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** Yes. Thanks so much for the question.

We believe that clarity with respect to accountability is paramount when it comes to good governance. The municipal sector runs on transparency and accountability. The challenges that happen when heads of departments are potentially accountable to an appointed chair, as opposed to their CAO, can be challenging and the impacts can be significant.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** Again, many of these decisions are multi-billion-dollar decisions at the regional government level with impacts directly on hundreds of thousands of Ontarians. So it is very critical that the lines of accountability are clear and that, ultimately, the buck stops with folks who are directly accountable to the electorate.

**Mr. Jeff Burch:** Do you know of any professional organization or municipal managers or anybody else that thinks it's a good idea to hire CAOs and department heads in this manner, with an appointed chair with strong-chair powers that can just bypass everyone and hire their friends or whoever they want?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you very much. The time is up.

Now, we move to the third party. MPP Blais.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Thank you, all three of you, for coming today.

Your Worship, you undersold yourself. You said 20 years; I just read it was closer to 25 years, so congratulations. You're also the mayor of Ramara. Is that right?

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** So the proposal is to cut council in half. Is that basically right?

*Interjection.*

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** As I understand it, county councillors make around 30-ish grand these days. You don't have to have to give the right number, but—

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** I believe it's around that number.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Right around there, right? So that's about a half a million dollars a year—16 times 30. You said that the county budget is about a billion dollars these days.

You also indicated that you have already, or your council has already, approved a significant quantum of housing that just can't be fulfilled because of lack of funding for infrastructure.

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** That's in my local municipality, yes.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** That's in Ramara?

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** Yes.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Okay. And at the county level, is that the same?

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** We have it across the board where, yes, there's been approvals in place, but the servicing just isn't there.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Sure, sure.

So just by way of background: I sat on Ottawa city council for a decade before getting elected to here. I don't know what it's like in Simcoe county or Ramara, but a half million dollars in Ottawa won't buy you much more than a turning lane. It certainly won't build a water plant or new roads.

The reduction of council might make conversation more efficient, but it won't actually give you sufficient funding to meet your housing or infrastructure backlog challenges.

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** No, it wasn't done over financial. We knew there would be—it's such an insignificant part of our budget that that wasn't the reason behind it.

With the technologies today, one mayor can represent the community. And now that we have alternates and Zoom platforms—I think we have some folks on Zoom today, or Teams—it just wasn't required to have that redundancy of a back-up councillor.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Sure, that's fair enough. Thank you very much for your service and for coming today.

My friends from AMO—Lindsay, thank you for your presentation. How important do you think democratic legitimacy is to local decision-making?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** It's absolutely foundational. We always talk about how the local government is the government that is closest to the people, that is most in touch with the issues and priorities that are part of the everyday lives of communities. It's also the most accountable in terms of the level of transparency that citizens have with respect to how local governments transact and make decisions. So any threat to that democratic legitimacy fundamentally undermines the credibility of the municipal government and the ability for it to do its job.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** And one of the benefits of democracy is that if you don't like what the person—or persons—is doing, you have an opportunity every couple of years to force them out of their job. That provides a degree of accountability to the voters.

In the super-strong appointed situation that this bill will create, the accountability mechanism is to the minister or the government. So is there concern then that it may, in fact, be the minister or the government who is directing traffic, so to speak, making decisions?

1630

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** It is definitely the case that we are advocating for a system of government where accountability is with the local electorate and is not with Queen's Park.

While in many cases the interests of provincial governments and municipal governments are aligned, provincial governments structurally are needing to balance issues and perspectives across a much different regional geography. It's absolutely critical that there is some way for local populations and for communities to be able to express their

priorities on the issues that most impact them on a daily basis.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** And I suppose now, with recent changes to freedom-of-information legislation, we wouldn't even be able to see whether the minister or his or her staff is directing the appointed chair of a region.

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** It is definitely a strength of local government, the degree of transparency—more transparency than any other order of government. So if there is a process where regional chairs are appointed, first we think that it needs to be appointed by the members of the regional council. Barring that, there needs to be a very transparent process with requirements—for example, residency in the area and potentially for appointees to have been previously elected to local office—for that to be legitimate.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Okay. I stand to be corrected—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I'll come to this thought in the next round, then.

Just from a regional trust perspective, how much trust can elected officials or even the public have in a situation where it is only required to have one-third support to decide where a highway might go or where a housing project might go or any number of other decisions?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** It absolutely by its nature would seem to breed significant discord at the local level. It would be extremely challenging, then, to retain that level of accountability when basic democratic principles aren't adhered to.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Thank you very much.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you. That concludes the first round of questioning.

We will move to the second round, and this time we will start with the government side. MPP Saunderson.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** I want to thank my colleagues for allowing me to continue my line of questioning, because I drifted off a bit.

Actually, I would like to start with you, Lindsay, just to talk about the appointment process. My understanding in Ontario is that only about 20% of Ontarians actually directly vote for their regional chair, and about 80%, whether it's done by the county or the region or the province, actually delegate that authority, and it's either done by the regional council members or, in two cases, by the province. Go ahead.

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** That's correct. Of the seven regional governments, the province has given itself the power at this point to appoint three of those heads of council. I believe, of the remaining four, around 75%, or three of those four, are directly elected by the electorate.

But there's a significant difference in a chair being appointed by members of regional council who are democratically elected by the local residents, as opposed to a chair being appointed by Queen's Park. There is that opportunity for the residents of that region to hold their elected members accountable for that decision every four years in a way that would not be the case with a provincial appointee.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Just so I'm clear, then, you're not suggesting that all regional upper-tier councils are directly elected—the chair or warden. You're saying that the delegation can happen; you just don't agree with it being at the provincial level?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** That's correct.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** Okay. But then you went on to say that, if it was to be at the provincial level, you had a specific list of requirements. I'm wondering if you could go through those for me, please.

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** Absolutely. Thank you for the opportunity.

We do think that the process itself needs to be transparent, needs to be open to the public. We think that the eligible members to be appointed need to be a resident in the region that they are representing, and we think that it would be best practice for them to have been locally elected, or served in elected office, in the region that they would be representing.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** All right, and in the interest of time, I'm going to keep my questions about the municipal services corporation for the appropriate forum next week, and I will relinquish the rest of my time.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Anand.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** It's nice to see you guys and thank you for coming. And it's just interesting: When I was listening to AMO—by the way, I love going to and visiting AMO. Hopefully, at some point of time in the future, we'll have infrastructure in Mississauga where we can host AMO. That's my dream. I don't know if I'll be around there by that time.

Interestingly, you talked about the data—how, in Ontario, the number of people per the municipal council is too big compared to the rest. And I said, “Okay, let me look at what's happening at other places.” So, entrusting me, I'll share some of the data.

In Ontario, we have 124 MPPs, and in British Columbia, there are 93, for 5.7 million people. So I was thinking, “I wish we would use the same formula.” Then we would have about 300 MPPs, if we have to compare with British Columbia and Alberta. And if we have to compare with the Yukon, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, they have one MPP per 2,000 people. So that would be around 8,000 MPPs. I don't know how we would accommodate that—8,000 MPPs. I'll leave that aside.

But what I wanted to say is, I think it's unique for the unique demographics to have that population and representation. But one thing that stands out, as we all know: It's not about having more MPPs or councillors; it is about what is functional, what is being used, and that's what Simcoe county has shown. I just wanted to say, as we are busy building our province, it is not about having the number of elected officials; it is about what is bringing the efficiencies.

So this is what I just wanted to say to Simcoe county. The province has been putting money into the infrastructure, and I'll let MPP Sandhu talk more about it. What is

your take on the needs of your county with respect to the infrastructure?

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** You did mention earlier about a municipal services corporation. We certainly see the need for one, not several, because we need that economy of scale to really make it work well and under the umbrella of Simcoe county. We've done so well with paramedic services, with waste management and with all the other services we run, this would be one that we would take on.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you. Over to MPP Sandhu.

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** One minute, Chair?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Sandhu.

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** Thank you to the presenters for the presentation. I just want to highlight—

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Mr. Amarjot Sandhu:** You talked about infrastructure investments. I just want to talk about how our government has made significant investments to support municipalities, especially in the Municipal Housing Infrastructure Program. We have doubled the OCIF funding, and also, we're collaborating with the federal government now on the Build Communities Strong Fund.

So, my question is: How do you see these investments compared to what municipalities experience under this government, as compared to the previous Liberal government?

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** Certainly, we've done well in Simcoe county partnering with this government, with all the investments you've done—especially around Honda and some of the waste water projects. No, it's been great to see that investment. There's still a lot of work to be done.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you. We move to the official opposition. MPP Gates, the floor is yours.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I appreciate it. Thank you to the presenters for being here. I'm going to talk to Lindsay for a bit. Lindsay, have you ever been to Niagara?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** I have, yes.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Do you like it down there?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** It's beautiful.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** The wineries, the museums, all that—yes?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** Absolutely.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** When are you bringing AMO to Niagara Falls? I just want to get that out.

Bill 100 will make major changes to regional governance in Ontario, including allowing the province to appoint certain upper-tier heads of council and giving them appointed-chair, strong-chair powers. So, my question to you is: Before today, has AMO been consulted by the province on the decisions to move to appointed regional chairs?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** No, we have not.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** And how many municipalities does AMO represent?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** Now that Toronto is back in the fold, it's the 444.

1640

**MPP Wayne Gates:** So you represent 440 municipalities and the province of Ontario didn't think it was important enough to consult your organization?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** I'm sure that there were many conversations with our members.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Does AMO believe a provincially appointed chair with strong-chair powers strengthens or weakens local democracy, accountability?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** We do believe that it would weaken local democracy and accountability. Without that direct line to the electorate, there is no way that the residents of a region can fire a chair that might not be serving in their best interests.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** What are the risks of removing directly elected regional councillors from a growing region like Niagara?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** Well, AMO doesn't actually weigh in on specific decisions around composition of individual councils. Our position is that the local municipalities and the local residents know best and those decisions need to be left to municipalities. We've heard from both Regional Councillor Sorrento and the warden about the uniqueness of each of their regions. We do believe that those decisions are best made with the local municipalities.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** I appreciate that, but you also said that we don't have as many elected regional councillors or elected councillors than other places in the province of Ontario. It certainly isn't because of cost. They don't make a lot of money. I was a councillor; I didn't get rich very quickly as a councillor. Most people want to be a councillor or a regional councillor because they care about their community, they have the passion and the heart to make their community better not only for the residents that are there but also for their kids and their grandkids. That's why they run for regional council; that's why it's important to have local reps run these organizations.

Has AMO been consulted on the proposed weighted-voting framework for Niagara or for any community?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** No, we have not.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** You haven't been consulted on that either?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** No, but we would not have a perspective on the specific use of weighted voting for specific councils. We think that that decision, again, is best left with local municipalities and residents.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** But having said that, with your organization representing municipalities, you don't believe it should be driven down from the province; it should be done with the local municipalities? There's a big difference, right?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** That's correct.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** It's the same, like the strong-mayor powers, the strong-chair powers, all done from Queen's Park by Premier Ford and the minister. You agree that that all should be done locally, not force-fed.

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** That's correct.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Okay. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I want to make sure that we're clear on that.

Is AMO concerned about concentrating power in the hands of a chair who is not directly elected by local residents?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** We do think that the best way forward is either to have the chair directly elected or to have the chair appointed by members of regional council who are elected themselves. There needs to be some kind of direct accountability to the residents.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** And do you know what? Your organization is very smart, because I agree with you 100% on that, and I think that's exactly where we should go.

Saying that, would you like to see this bill, I guess, withdrawn, and go back to the drawing board and actually come up with something that the municipalities in the province of Ontario can support in the betterment of all the municipalities, not just Niagara and Simcoe and Durham? I mean, what they've done here is just—I don't know; "criminal" is a bad word, so I won't use it, but what they've done isn't right, for sure, without consultation, without talking to local municipalities, not just in Niagara but right across the province. It's about power, it's about control, all those things.

I've got another question. I'll let you forget that one.

Are property tax increases paying for services that should be provincially funded?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** Yes, they are. In 2025, AMO has calculated that \$5.5 billion of municipal taxpayer money goes towards subsidizing areas of provincial responsibility.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Can you do me a favour? Say that again, because that's important, because every municipality that I've talked to, including Niagara, is watching their property taxes go through the roof, whether it's at the regional level or the municipal level. And what's happening is this government says all the time—throws it in our face: "We haven't raised one tax in the province of Ontario." No, what you've done is you've downloaded onto municipalities at a tune of—how much?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** It was \$5.5 billion in 2025.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Now, you said "billion" with a B, right?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** Billion.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Yes. Would governance restructuring reduce property taxes if the province does not address these underlying costs?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** No, it would not.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you very much. The time is up—

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Oh, I've got a couple more. Can I just go longer?

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** No, sorry.

We move next to the third party. MPP Blais.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Your Worship, I'm just pulling up the population of Simcoe county and how it breaks down

by the municipalities. I apologize—it's very quick and I don't expect you to know this all off the top of your head.

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** It's just over 350,000.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** But as I have the rankings—basically: Innisfil, Bradford, New Tecumseth, Wasaga Beach, Collingwood.

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** Yes.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Okay. And Ramara is close to the bottom, right?

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** Yes.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** How would you feel if the unelected, appointed chair of the new county framework got together with the mayors of Innisfil, Bradford, New Tecumseth, Wasaga Beach and Collingwood, which represents just over one third of the population of Simcoe county? What if the new unelected chair and those five mayors got together and said, "Do you know what? We're really going to stick it to Ramara today and vote against them on all the roads you need or a community centre you want to build," or something like that?

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** Well, keep in mind we've always had a weighted vote, and six to seven communities could sway the vote for the 16.

I guess that brings our next question, with the strong-warden powers. One of our questions we have to the minister is, how does that weighted vote work? We have a formula for a weighted vote. Our formula would have been that the warden had the least amount. So if you're going to challenge that weighted vote, is it one third weighted vote or one third the members of the House that would vote on that? And we'll seek clarification on that and continue to work with the ministry. We would prefer, if you're going to go down that road, that it would not be a weighted vote when you're challenging, say, a strong mayor. It would be one third of the House would vote versus a weighted vote.

We have it right now that governance issues are not a weighted vote.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Governance issues are not a weighted vote?

**Mr. Basil Clarke:** Yes.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Okay, thank you very much. I appreciate it.

For AMO: You represent 444 municipalities.

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** Yes.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Only one of those with a professional hockey team that made the playoffs this year.

As part of that representation—obviously Ontario is a broad, broad province. We've got tiny little towns of probably less than a thousand people, and giant, large metropolises like Toronto of millions and millions and millions. A one-size-fits-all kind of approach doesn't really work in that environment. Would you agree?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** That's correct. And you see that with the variation of approaches to governance that have been adopted across Ontario and that have grown up and evolved historically to reflect important local differences, differences in population, in the way that townships and

towns relate to each other and make decisions about specific elements.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** And so, like the 9,500 people who live in Ramara can get together and decide how they're going to govern themselves and the million people who live in Ottawa can get together and decide how to govern themselves, they might come up to completely different conclusions on how that might work. There's a lot of value in having that kind of very local point of view on these kinds of things.

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** Absolutely. I think that MPP Gates made a really important point, when you talked about the people who get involved in local government are the people that care deeply about their communities and are connected to their communities and those priorities. And we believe that those people are best-positioned to make decisions about the way that communities and neighbourhoods govern themselves.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** So you had suggested that if the government is intent with going through this unelected process for the appointment for regional chairs, if I recall your criteria, they should live locally within the county or the municipality we're talking about. You would prefer that they had been elected to some local office, I presume, not that they were elected in BC and moved to Simcoe or something like this, right?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** Yes.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Was there one other?

**Ms. Lindsay Jones:** And that the process itself be transparent to the residents.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Sure. I don't agree with the conclusion that the government is, but I think that's a fair point of view, if that's the way they take.

In the room right now, we have two people that would fit that description. We have the MPP for Simcoe—and I'm probably getting the name of the riding wrong, but he lives over there—and we've got the mayor of Ramara and warden of Simcoe county. So I'm wondering if you guys are going to have a face-off for this new job.

**Mr. Brian Saunderson:** He's just trying to get rid of me.

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** I'm teasing, of course. I don't want to put anyone on the spot. I'm just trying to have a little fun as we get to the end of a very long day.

I don't actually have any more substantive questions, so thank you very much for your attendance today and your points of view.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** That concludes our panel time. Thank you to the presenters for coming and sharing your opinions and point of view and enriching our discussion and debate.

As a reminder for anyone who would like to submit any written comments to the committee on Bill 100, the deadline for written submissions is 6 p.m. today, April 28, 2026.

A reminder for members who wish to file amendments to Bill 100: The deadline to file amendments with the Clerk is 7 p.m. today, April 28, 2026.

*Interjection.*

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Do you have a point of order?

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Sort of. My hearing is not as good as I'm getting older. Did you say they've got until 6 o'clock today?

**Mr. Stephen Blais:** Seven o'clock.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Seven o'clock is for the members to submit amendments.

**MPP Wayne Gates:** Yes, that's better. Okay. Thank you.

**The Acting Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** There being no further business, this committee is adjourned until 10 a.m. on Thursday, April 30, 2026, when the committee will meet to conduct clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 100.

Thank you very much, all of you, for your patience. Good night.

*The committee adjourned at 1652.*





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**Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes**

Mr. Stephen Blais (Orléans L)

Mr. Rob Cerjanec (Ajax L)

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Ms. Tanzima Khan

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