

Bill 100, Better Regional Governance Act, 2026

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in the consultation process for the Legislative committee on Bill 100, Better Regional Governance Act. (Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy)

I am not representing any organization but for context you should be aware that I have experience as a Municipal Councillor for the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake for over half a decade.

Today I am talking about "Democracy - a government by the people, a form of government in which the 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, and free to choose those who shall govern my country".

Today I choose to stand for what I think is right and that is:

- Having citizens have a say in determining the governance structure for our Region; and
- the freedom to choose who shall govern our Region – not have the Chair appointed by the Minister.

You are proposing that we reduce the Regional Councillors from 31 to 12. This is a significant loss of representation for constituents – less democracy.

Furthermore, you propose some sort of weighted voting for the 12. We have no idea what form that will take, however, it will end up having the larger municipalities out-vote the smaller municipalities. It would jeopardize the interests of smaller rural 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.

- First capital of upper Canada
- War of 1812, where people from this area repelled the forces of the United States
- We are a rural community surrounded by the best growing area in Canada for tender fruit and grapes

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 this Bill is the strong Chair power. The Minister appointed chairs will have increased authority to pass policies and, have the ability to veto or override the decisions of democratically-elected local officials and substitute their own judgement, 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. This Bill makes the Chair an unelected member of Council for 8 Regions in Ontario. The other regions can elect their Chairs, thereby establishing two governance models for Ontario and making some Regions democratic than others, some more equal than others. This is not the spirit of democracy that this country knows and people fought to maintain.

You have stated that the goal of this Bill is to support more efficient and effective regional councils. Is it more efficient if citizens can't talk to their Regional representatives because of the reduction in numbers. Is it more effective if smaller municipalities get outvoted by 2 larger municipalities and lose their voice?

It is stated that this Bill is aimed at speeding up housing and infrastructure development, by giving these 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 the strong Chair powers. Other mechanisms are needed to help achieve the government's goal, but that is not the objective of this hearing.

Please reconsider the strong chair powers, and allow for full consultation with the people on the Regional governance change. Thank you for this opportunity.

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