

To The Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs,

I am writing in regards to Bill 229, Schedule 6 (proposed changes to the Conservation Authorities Act and consequential amendments). I urge you to remove this schedule entirely from this bill. While some of the proposals are sensible, mostly they aim to hamstring Conservation Authorities and take away their power and legal role to protect the people of Ontario and our environment. The Conservation Authorities have, for decades, been protecting people, property, and the environment by making measured decisions based on research and consultation about the management of our watersheds. Bill 229, Schedule 6 would prevent them from doing that, and instead will allow developers and other short-sighted parties to do as they wish to our wetlands and watersheds, with no consideration of consequences or the damage to people and the environment that will be cause.

The importance of wetlands and the research-based management of them in Ontario cannot be overstated; the flood prevention alone offered by well-managed wetlands allows us in Southern Ontario to live where and as we do, without being worried about our homes and livelihoods being destroyed. With climate change, these wetland functions will become ever more important, and in preventing Ontario's Conservation Authorities from doing their job in managing and protecting our watersheds, you are dooming us in Ontario to increased flooding, decreased water quality, less outdoor spaces, and many other consequences that will irreparably damage our lives. The loss of biodiversity alone that will be caused by the improper management of wetlands should be enough of a reason to prevent the role of Conservation Authorities being destroyed.

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated the value of conservation areas and other outdoor green spaces in which we can spend our time, and this proposal – pushed through in the middle of this pandemic, when we need these green spaces more than ever – will harm physical and mental wellbeing on Ontarians for generations.

In addition, putting these changes through as part of a budget bill, so there can be only very limited public consultation, and additionally in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, when people are worried about many things, is at best misguided and underhanded and at worst a very calculated and deliberate subvention of democracy and legality in Ontario. It sends an incredibly clear message that the only important things to the government of Ontario is development at any cost, whatever might be said publicly, and that the opinions of anyone except developers and industry stakeholders are irrelevant.

Is that what the government of Ontario stands for? As a resident of Ontario, that is not a government that I want to have, and a province run under those principles is not one that I am proud to live in. I implore you to do the right thing and withdraw this schedule.

Yours sincerely,

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