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To: Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, comm-financeaffairs@ola.org

Re: Letter of Concern related to Changes to the Conservation Authorities Act, Bill 229,
Schedule 6

I am very concerned about some of the changes being proposed in your Budget Bill 229 as they relate to the functioning, scope, capability and planning aspects of Conservation Authorities in Ontario. I believe that we need a more fulsome and open public review and open discussion on the role of Conservation Authorities in Ontario and not have changes made, buried in a Budget Bill. We have an opportunity to build a much better set of organizations through a good process, not hobble them and prevent them from carrying on a legacy of sound science and management in Ontario as they have demonstrated for over 70 years.

I am a long-time resident of Halton Hills and have worked as a policy person and watershed scientist in Ontario for many years. In that time, colleagues of mine in the US and in Federal Policy in the US have praised the creation and work of Conservation Authorities in Ontario. At least two Conservation Authorities in Ontario have won international awards as some of the best examples of sound environmental management in the world. These awards are the Theiss Environmental Awards presented each year in Australia. So, my question is, if it isn't broken, and I believe it is NOT broken, why are we changing substantive parts of their role and activities as seen in Schedule 6?

I have experienced and witnessed the systematic contraction in capability, focus and capacity of the senior sister agencies of CAs in Ontario, namely the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks. I will admit that this contraction began back in the mid-1990s and has not diminished through other governments but has progressed through your government. Without active

“boots on the ground” and clear management and oversight, our environment and resources are continuing to fail. There is no App for this.

The ONLY organization left that has picked up the slack has been the Conservation Authorities. If you wish less active oversight of resources and environment from Provincial Ministries I would be adding to responsibilities of CAs, NOT diminishing their ability to help protect our watersheds, biodiversity, water quantity and quality, but that appears to be what you are doing.

The role played by CAs in Ontario over the last 70 years has saved the province likely billions of dollars in damage and has helped to heal our watersheds from previous, unchecked private interest developments. There have been studies on this subject. So, instead of “throwing the baby out with the bath water” which I see with changes to CA purpose, roles, responsibility, oversight and planning capability, I see a need to open a dialogue and improve their capability, or start to properly fund the Provincial agencies that are now, to a large degree lame duck ministries when it comes to proactive management of our natural resources and environment. We saw during Hurricane Hazel the results of bad development and planning in Ontario and we solved it. We continue to see it many times in other Canadian and American jurisdictions over the last number of years as well that do not have organizations such as Conservation Authorities. We have a system that works and needs tweaking, not a system that needs control and devolution of activities and responsibilities.

If we have learned one thing after the major floods of two years ago, that is that our system of floodplain regulations, restoration and protection of sensitive areas works during catastrophic weather patterns where we have CAs. Where those protections are not in place, such as in the Muskokas, we have greater problems. Also if this pandemic has shown anything, it is that people need more green space and healthy natural areas for their well-being. Simply limiting CAs and their municipalities to existing protected areas is not enough we need to build more and work with landowners and communities to improve stewardship on private lands as well. CAs have shown us that they have and do this in a proactive way that improves environmental, personal and economic outcomes.

I urge your committee to remove Schedule 6 from the budget bill and have the government restart a proper, PUBLIC dialogue with our communities, municipalities and CAs. I am aware of the previous consultations in the past year and feel that these under-represented the range of organizations and people that needed to be consulted on this important matter.

I believe we can save money AND create a stronger set of organizations efficiently looking after the public good rather than pandering to short-term private interests. Private interests which may mean well but do not have the public interest at heart for

the long-term. Given the strong support by the majority of municipalities that have CAs in Ontario, I believe that they may know something that you may be overlooking.

I wish us all to conserve and better manage our watersheds and landscapes for everyone so that these watersheds which comprise our natural infrastructure are stronger, more resilient with good organizations, working on a watershed basis to ensure that their watersheds are better for people and the local environment. Is this too much to ask of a Conservative government?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'J.G. Imhof'.

J.G. Imhof,
Aquatic Ecologist
Georgetown, ON