November 25, 2020

Finance and Economic Affairs Committee

Attention: Committee Clerk, Julia Douglas

99 Wellesley Street West
Room 1405, Whitney Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON
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Dear Finance and Economic Affairs Committee **(OR LOCAL MPP). If sending to local MPP, please change the address above.**

RE: Changes to Conservation Authorities Act and Conservation Authorities’ Role in Land Use Planning

I strongly oppose the proposed changes to the Conservation Authorities Act set out in Schedule 6 of Bill 229 that curtail the role of Conservation Authorities in watershed planning and management.

I am deeply concerned that these proposed changes were brought forward in a budget bill, thereby over-riding my right to comment under the Environmental Bill of Rights. I request that you remove Schedule 6 in its entirety from Bill 229 because the proposed changes will create more red tape and higher costs for taxpayers as well as threaten the independent watershed-based approach used by conservation authorities.

Ontario’s Conservation Authorities are a unique and widely respected innovation. They provide a much-valued bridge across municipal boundaries to understand and address environmental concerns, such as flooding. Because they operate at the watershed level, they are ideally positioned to encourage science-based collaborative strategies and decision-making. Their vital role in land use planning and permitting must be retained to ensure that development does not put communities at risk from flooding and other climate change impacts through loss of wetlands, woodlands, and farmland.

The changes proposed in Schedule 6 will reduce or constrain the mandate of Conservation Authorities, and are therefore contradictory to the interests of the people of Ontario who are facing enormous risks and costs as a result of climate change and ongoing biodiversity loss. The roles and responsibilities of Conservation Authorities are critical in protecting the lands, waters and wildlife which benefit businesses and communities across Ontario, and upon which our health and well-being ultimately depend.

My local conservation authority, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) has been keeping the environment, people and property of our watershed safe from natural hazards for the past 61 years with a mandate to further the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources across Niagara, Hamilton and Haldimand watersheds. During the Pandemic, they experienced an increase in illegal activities on conservation area lands and regulated areas. Extensive remediation costs and damages to neighbouring properties can be avoided if tools such as enhanced powers of inspection and stop work orders are available to conservation authority officers.

Over the past few years, they have invested heavily in implementing measures for the highest standards of customer service for our communities. They have also invested significantly on improved governance based on the Auditor General’s recommendations.

I am disappointed that the proposed changes are contrary to the Special Advisor’s Report on Flooding and Ontario’s Flooding Strategy and many of the enabling recommendations from the 2018 Special Audit of the NPCA by the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario. Requiring conservation authority board members to all be municipal councillors will impact how they make decisions, as they will be based on the interest of the municipalities and not the conservation authority and watersheds they serve. As such, I firmly believe that Board appointments should remain the decision of our local municipalities in consultation with conservation authorities.

Schedule 6 of Bill 229, proposes amendments which have the potential to add significant delays in the planning and permitting process, add costs and have the potential for significant impacts on the NPCA’s ability to provide flooding and natural hazards management/protection and drinking water protection to our communities.

**I am writing you today to urge you to remove Schedule 6 in its entirety from Bill 229.**

Respectfully,

Sign your name here with details you wish to provide.