



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

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December 1, 2022

To: Laurie Scott (MPP Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock) Chair of the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy

Re: Bill 39, Better Municipal Governance Act, 2022

Dear Chair Scott and Members of the Standing Committee:

This past week, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) had its Advocacy Day at Queen's Park, which provided the Association an opportunity to meet with Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) to discuss its priorities and current public education issues. Of note, it was the same day that Bill 23, *More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022* received Royal Assent. OPSBA has been following this legislation and did send a [letter](#) in September to the Minister of Education and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing. We expressed our concerns about the speed of the province's housing initiative (to build 1.5 million homes over the next 10 years) and the need to include school boards in the discussion regarding growth. Building more housing impacts communities and schools are the hubs of many communities. We also note the need for appropriate and corresponding funding to support school infrastructure.

Our concerns regarding this particular legislation, Bill 39, Better Municipal Governance Act, 2022, build on the earlier comments expressed given that it directly refers to a "prescribed provincial priority" that for now means the government's housing plan.

As stated in our [Grants for Student Needs](#) submission, "Much time and effort are spent at school boards developing Long-Term Program and Accommodation Strategies in a manner that balances student enrolment and equitable access to programming... Consideration must also be given to the use of schools by local child care partners and community groups. In many areas, schools remain community hubs and need to be supported for their widespread and before and after school usage."

We do want to acknowledge that school boards have recently been invited to participate in an Urban Schools/Growth Framework Working Group. We are supportive of this initiative to include our members when discussing future school capital options in urban, rapidly intensifying areas. However, our members have indicated that there should be consideration made to include all parts of the province in the government's housing plans, including northern, rural and remote communities. It is also worth noting that many school boards have jurisdictions that cover areas that are mixtures of rural and urban.

Our recommendation would be to have a thoughtful, strategic and collaborative planning process that covers the entire province and includes key stakeholders. School boards must be

included early on in planning processes, especially if they are sped up, to ensure there are enough spaces for local pupils. There have been past instances where notices have been placed at development sites advising purchasers that there may not be space for their children in local schools.

Accommodation pressures also occur in rural areas where students are unable to attend a nearby school, making for longer bus routes. This in turn exacerbates the complex transportation issues that school boards are experiencing, which include an ongoing lack of drivers and buses and insufficient budget to cover the costs involved.

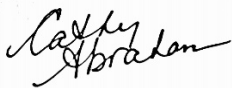
Moreover, many boards could also share experiences about the “temporary” use of portables, the challenges with availability of portables, and insufficient outdoor space on elementary school properties for student play and recreation.

Another recommendation would be to consider fast-tracking developments that are income-g geared affordable housing to serve the needs of more families and to also plan developments where services already exist (medical, commercial, transit, utilities, and road networks).

The other component of this legislation is the appointment of regional municipal councils in Niagara, Peel and York, while also providing the mayors in Ottawa and Toronto more power with the ability to pass bylaws that involve “provincial priorities” with just one-third of support from council. OPSBA has always strongly supported the view that local democratically elected trustees make a significant and direct contribution to the achievement of all students through their leadership in directing the policies and priorities of their local school boards, which in turn shapes a culture of continuous improvement. In a publicly funded education system, trustees are the decision-makers that know their communities best. They are the crucial link between the school board and the local community members that voted for them.

This proposed change to appoint individuals that were previously democratically elected to office by their constituents is worrisome. We know that the inclusion of this has brought much discussion among other groups that represent elected officials and strongly suggest the government reconsider this proposal. We would also like to understand what else could be considered a government priority and the factors that determine its importance.

Thank you for this opportunity.



Cathy Abraham
President



W.R. (Rusty) Hick
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cc.

Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister

Dasha Androusenkov, Deputy Director of Stakeholder Relations (Minister of Education’s Office)

The Ontario Public School Boards’ Association represents English public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario, which together serve more than 1.3 million public elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the English public school system in Ontario.