

Proposed Changes to Ethical Framework for Municipal Elected Officials

AMO'S SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE,
INFRASTRUCTURE AND CULTURAL POLICY CONCERNING BILL 9, MUNICIPAL
ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2025

July 8, 2025

Introduction

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) is a non-partisan, non-profit association representing the 444 municipal governments across Ontario. Municipal governments work through AMO to achieve shared goals and meet common challenges. As the frontline order of government closest to the people, municipal governments are deeply invested in promoting healthy local democracy and accountability.

Given this, AMO is pleased to provide comments about Bill 9, *An Act to Amend the City of Toronto Act, 2006 and the Municipal Act, 2001 in Relation to Codes of Conduct* or known in short as the *Municipal Accountability Act, 2025*. This submission provides AMO's recommendations about amendments to strengthen the legislation to ensure that it delivers on its promise and potential to hold municipal officials to the highest ethical standards.

General Support

Municipal governments are the most trusted, open and transparent order of government. Maintaining ethical behaviour and respectful discourse are at the heart of public trust. All Ontarians also expect to work in a safe and respectful environment, including members of council when they agree to take office. Municipalities have seen that the current tools available to municipal councils to ensure ethical behaviour are inadequate and do not meet public expectations. Since 2021, AMO and its members have continued to call on the province for better tools to enforce accountability for municipal elected officials.

AMO is pleased to see the government action in response to sector concerns. We largely support these proposed changes, including enabling the standardization of municipal codes of conduct and integrity commissioner investigation processes. AMO also commends the government and Standing Committee for their broad sector engagement on the legislation as well as the commitment to consult with municipalities on the regulations that will support this evolving framework.

With scoped amendments, this legislation will help reinforce accountability and support both a safe and respectful work environment for members of council and for municipal staff.

Recommended Amendment 1: Adjust Unanimous Consent

Changes proposed to:

Section, 160.0.4 (2), Schedule 1, *City of Toronto Act, 2006* and
Section 223.4.0.4 (2), Schedule 2, *Municipal Act, 2001*

AMO recommends that the removal from office vote be adjusted from unanimous to a supermajority (a vote by at least 2/3 of Council). Previously, AMO had advocated for the removal from office procedure to be in the hands of the judiciary. However, in recognizing the government's interest in leaving this decision to elected municipal officials, we believe a council supermajority vote is more appropriate.

We recognize that a vote to remove an elected municipal official from office is fundamentally different than a regular council vote, but the current proposal sets too high of a threshold and poses equity issues as council sizes vary across the province. In addition, the removal process already includes significant checks and balances that reduce the need for a unanimous vote, including recommendations for removal from both the local integrity commissioner and the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario.

Recommended Amendment 2: Provide a Range of Penalties

Changes proposed to:

Section, 160 (5), Schedule 1, *City of Toronto Act, 2006* and
Section 223.4 (5), Schedule 2, *Municipal Act, 2001*

AMO recommends that the legislation includes a progressive range of discipline options for integrity commissioners that are aligned with what was established under the *Education Act* in 2023. These options would provide a standard list of penalties that could be applied apart from removal from office, including censure of a member, barring attendance at meetings, barring a member from sitting on committees, and barring a member from being chair or vice chair of committees.

Conclusion

AMO commends the government for taking action to address the concerns raised across the sector. Municipal councils have been looking for new tools to address modern challenges in local government, including stronger mechanisms to address situations of serious misconduct when they arise. Where there is a serious code of conduct violation, municipal councils need the authority to take actions that are measured, appropriate and effective.

Our members are proud to serve their communities and understand that sitting on municipal councils is both a privilege and a responsibility. We look forward to continuing to work with the provincial government to preserve and improve public confidence in our communities.