

Protecting Democracy and Local Governance

AMO'S SUBMISSION TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON HERITAGE,
INFRASTRUCTURE AND CULTURAL POLICY

Bill 100, Better Regional Governance Act

April 28, 2026

About AMO

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) is a non-profit, non-partisan association that represents the interests of all 444 municipal governments across Ontario. AMO addresses common challenges facing our members and provides meaningful advice to the provincial and federal governments on practical solutions on a wide range of issues that directly impact local governments and the citizens they serve.

Table of Contents

About AMO	1
Introduction	2
Analysis and Recommendations	3
Recommendation 1: Keep the selection of regional chairs and county wardens local.....	3
Recommendation 2: Empower municipalities to determine their own composition.....	4
Recommendation 3: Leave weighted voting to local communities that best understand local needs	5
Recommendation 4: Pass the legislation reforming municipal Code of Conduct legislation	5
Conclusion	6

Introduction

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and the 444 municipalities we represent are committed to delivering strong, effective local governance. We understand that Bill 100, *Better Regional Governance Act, 2026*, which was introduced earlier this year would make changes to Durham, Halton, Muskoka, Niagara, Peel, Waterloo, and York Regions, as well as Simcoe County to:

- Allow the Minister to appoint or remove the Regional Chairs and Warden at any time following the municipal election, and if no appointment is made, the Chair would be appointed by members of council at their first meeting.
- Provide the appointed heads of council with “strong chair” powers that mirror existing “strong mayor” powers.
- Change the composition of Niagara and Simcoe Councils to be made up of the mayors of each lower-tier municipalities plus the appointed head of council.
- Require regions to review their council composition following the 2026 elections.
- Create a regulation-making authority allowing the Minister to require the use of weighted voting, set the number of votes for each member, and determine for what matters weighted voting will be used for.

Bill 100 cannot be considered in isolation. These proposed changes come forward within a landscape of ongoing provincial action in areas of municipal jurisdiction, which undermine municipal authority and centralize decision making at the province.

Local democracy is the engine of community life. It is the most direct and accountable way for residents to shape the world they live in. Our neighbourhoods should be guided by the people who call them home.

Strong local governance turns collective vision into reality, fostering a sense of belonging, and ensuring that progress is rooted in local values and priorities. When we champion vibrant municipal democracy, we aren’t just protecting a system, we are empowering the local leadership and diverse voices necessary to build a resilient, self-determined future for every community in Ontario.

We are united in wanting all orders of government to work efficiently and effectively in

the best interests of their residents. Some targeted governance changes may help further this goal, but only if they are designed with local voice. A successful path forward relies on the province setting clear objectives, providing the right implementation supports, and conducting the local consultation necessary to make changes successful.

In this context, AMO is advancing four recommendations to help the government meet its goals of strong municipal governance without undermining local democracy:

- Keep the selection of regional chairs and county wardens local
- Empower municipalities to determine their own composition
- Structure the proposed weighted voting around representation by population
- Pass Bill 9 reforming municipal code of conduct legislation

In consideration of this feedback, we urge the province to work with us, not in place of us. This collaboration is key to achieving provincial goals.

Analysis and Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Keep the selection of regional chairs and county wardens local

The combination of provincially appointed heads of council with “strong chair” powers is fundamentally undemocratic. It erodes the ability for local residents to hold their elected officials to account and elect people who care about their priorities.

The introduction of Strong Mayor powers has been divisive with strong opinions on both sides. There’s concern that some of these powers undermine the collaborative nature of municipal government that has long been a strength of our system. Allowing municipalities mayors to make law with the support of just one third of Council runs counter to fundamental democratic principles. Similarly, allowing the head of Council to hire and fire the heads of departments and reorganize municipal administration is at odds with good corporate governance practices. AMO has concerns with these two specific powers.

For the first time, Ontario voters will have the chance this October to choose the Heads of Council they think will best wield those powers. But if this Bill passes, voters will have no say in the provincially appointed Strong Chairs making critical decisions on their

behalf.

Instead, we urge you to amend the Bill to require all regional council members – including the chair – be directly elected by their communities. This establishes a clear line of accountability to the residents they serve. Unlike provincial appointments, this keeps heads of council directly accountable to local voters.

However, if the province moves forward with appointed heads of council, we ask that regional councils instead be empowered to appoint a chair from among their own elected members. This model is already standard practice across counties. Appointing a regional strong chair in this manner combines the collaborative strengths of peer-selection – where the leader is vetted by fellow mayors – with the authority to drive regional growth. This structure strikes a practical balance. It provides the tools for decisive regional action while maintaining direct accountability to local constituents. Locally selected chairs and wardens are best positioned to work effectively with their local colleagues and advance shared community priorities.

Additionally, there must be minimum requirements for those individuals enshrined in the statute. First, a requirement to reside within the municipality. And second, a requirement to have previously served that community as an elected official.

Recommendation 2: Empower municipalities to determine their own composition

The number of councillors at the table impacts the effectiveness of a council and the ability to represent residents. Too many members of council can slow decision-making; and too few dilutes the voices of residents. We agree that it is good practice for municipalities to regularly review council composition and listen to residents to determine if there is a need to change the number of elected officials.

At the same time, at a ratio of almost 4,000 residents per councillor¹, Ontario's municipal elected officials represent more residents than councillors in every other province except for British Columbia – this is triple the national average for council representations. Ontario's regional municipalities see an even higher average of over

¹ 3,955 according to research from the University of Calgary on [Municipalities and Municipal Electoral Institutions in Canada](#)

30,000 residents per member² reflecting their ongoing work to keep councils efficient and effective while balancing the importance of democratic representation.

Arbitrarily reducing the number of council members without local input or consent only serves to increase this ratio, undermining the important work councils are already doing to deliver efficient, effective decision making.

For these reasons, we support the proposed requirement for regional councils to review council composition following an election. This keeps decisions about governance and representation local, allowing communities to determine the right number of elected officials to meet the expectation of residents.

Recommendation 3: Leave weighted voting to local communities that best understand local needs

Bill 100 would provide the Minister with regulatory-making authority to unilaterally determine weighted voting in the regions and county prescribed. AMO believes that local councils are best positioned to determine how and when to use weighted voting. At the same time, because needs and priorities vary across lower-tier municipalities, regions and counties understand that weighted voting requires careful application to avoid creating unfair advantages or disadvantages between neighbouring communities. Many upper-tier councils already use some form of weighted voting to balance these interests.

If the province chooses to move forward with a mandatory weighted voting framework, it is critical that open and transparent engagement occur with each community beforehand to ensure community understanding and buy-in. This is essential for the ongoing integrity of our local democracy.

Recommendation 4: Pass the legislation reforming municipal Code of Conduct legislation

Finally, AMO continues to call for the passage of measures included in Bill 9 which was introduced almost a year ago following years of advocacy from municipalities calling for

² 30,686 according to research from the University of Calgary on [Municipalities and Municipal Electoral Institutions in Canada](#)

code of conduct legislation.

Maintaining ethical behaviour and respectful discourse are at the heart of public trust, and the ability of councils to make effective, collaborative decisions for residents. All Ontarians also expect to work in a safe and respectful environment, including members of council when they agree to take office. The current tools available to municipal councils to ensure ethical behaviour are inadequate and do not meet public expectations. Yet, despite continued provincial intervention into municipal governance, the province has still not passed this important legislation.

Code of conduct legislation is especially important in context with the decision to appoint heads of council. As Premier Ford and successive Ministers of Municipal Affairs have said, elections are the mechanism for voters to remove members of council from office if they have lost public trust as a result misconduct. With the move to appointed regional heads of council, if Bill 9 is not passed, hundreds of thousands of Ontarians will lose this ability to hold their regional chairs accountable at the ballot box.

Conclusion

AMO supports the intended outcomes of this legislation – effective, meaningful decision making by municipal governments. However, we remain concerned that it is the next in a series of decisions that continues to remove authority from local officials in favour of concentrating decision making at Queen’s Park. Neighbourhoods belong to the people who call them home, not to the province.

Local democracy is at the centre of our communities and municipalities are the level of government closest to the people. Changes that centralize decision making and disconnect the line of accountability from voters directly to elected officials undermine the democratic principles that Ontarians expect. Furthermore, they undermine the ability of councils to represent the interests of their residents and deliver effective services.

We urge the government to work with us, not in place of us as it explores governance changes. Collaboration is key to achieving provincial goals. AMO appreciates the opportunity to continue working with the government to evolve local governance.