
Canadian Union of Public Employees Ontario

Submission to The Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy's Study on Regional Governance

January 18, 2024



CUPE Ontario represents over 290,000 members in the province, in sectors including health care, education, universities, social services, and municipal services. Our membership also includes thousands of residents and constituents in communities across Ontario that are represented by, and rely on services in single, upper, and lower tier municipalities.

As such, CUPE Ontario has a vested interest in the review of regional governance and is pleased to provide the following submission for consideration by the Committee. It is important to note the context in which this Committee is holding these consultations. Within the last two years, the Provincial government had committed to dissolve the Region of Peel, only to reverse their decision after further scrutiny and immense pushback which brought with it the evidence of the complexity and costs associated with such a dissolution.

Any change to the tiered municipal governance structures that exist throughout the province must be thoroughly and thoughtfully analyzed and must include long-term costing as well as consideration of the impacts of changes on the residents and workers of the communities in question.

There have been several reviews of regional governance since the Conservative Government was elected in 2018, including the Simcoe County regional review in 2019.

Changes to regional governance and the services delivered therein must be fully examined before any decision is made. Regional service delivery has been the norm for decades now, and to separate upper and lower tier municipalities without fulsome, transparent, public, and expert consultation will lead to service disruption, continue to erode public trust in the government, have negative impacts on worker recruitment and retention, and hinder the municipal budgeting process.

Municipal governments, whether upper, lower, or single tier, are under immense budgetary constraints which were further impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Municipalities had to modify service delivery in 2020 to respond to public health and safety concerns, and many are returning to their first “normal” budget cycle after the pandemic and the 2022 municipal elections. It is important to ensure municipal councils and staff can create stable, long term budget forecasting, without additional pressures such as restructuring. CUPE Ontario therefore recommends this Committee not pursue any legislative changes to the regional governance system.

Ontarians are already dealing with ongoing challenges resulting from historic underfunding of municipal services. The Provincial government proposal to move away from regional governance is a short-sighted attempt to fix this problem. The province should proceed with any proposed change to the system of regional governance only after fulsome studies have forecasted the long-term impacts of such changes, and after a proper cost-benefit analysis to see if any monetary benefit accrues without adversely affecting the public services and the municipal workers that deliver them. CUPE Ontario recommends that the Provincial government increase its funding to municipalities to

close the gaps in service provision and strengthen the social programs that Ontarians rely on in communities across the province.

Decisions about governance and funding are too often made based on the cycle of electoral politics, to the detriment of the residents and workers in Ontario. The current Provincial Conservative government needs to look beyond a campaign re-election lens to understand the issues facing our municipal and regional governments, and to ensure that systems of funding are in place to provide the systems and services that the people of Ontario rely on.

Income inequality is rising at unprecedented levels, and young Ontarians have given up on the dream of home ownership since the average cost of a single-family home has doubled in the last 5 years, and rents continue to outpace wages, thanks to the Ford government removing rent caps on new builds in 2019. Those who are lucky enough to have entered the housing market are dealing with constantly rising interest rates, and the impact of sometimes double digit property tax increases that many municipalities have been forced to approved. These costs will continue to hit working people disproportionately, and in turn increase the reliance on public services that our regional and municipal governments are mandated to provide.

While MPP's have housing and travel costs coverage, and a salary well above the average Ontarian, we implore you to try and imagine yourselves in the shoes of young and working people in our province. The financial realities are dire, the job prospects are limited, and even for working people the prospect of benefits and pensions are a relic of the past.

While CUPE Ontario understands and respects that this Committee is tasked with reviewing regional governance, we remind you of the core public policy objectives as set out by former Minister Clark: local autonomy managing growth, stability and reliability of public services, and respect for taxpayers. CUPE Ontario believes that these objectives will be met when the Provincial government fulfils their legislative mandate to fund municipal services that improve the quality of life for all community members.

CUPE Ontario cautions against any changes to the system of regional governance without first:

- hearing from and listening to the public, including municipal workers and residents who rely on municipal services;
- conducting a fulsome cost-benefit analysis of the financial impacts of regional restructuring, and ensuring that any changes would benefit municipal budgets;
- outlining to the public exactly how any changes to regional governance would benefit municipalities, workers, and residents.

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