January 18, 2019

**Re: Bill 66, Restoring Ontario’s Competitiveness Act**

I am writing you today on behalf of the 46 members of the Cambridge Club of the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW).   The purpose of CFUW is to promote understanding and friendship among university women and to work for the advancement of education, art, science, literature and social reform. As volunteers, public servants, artists, musicians and professionals in many fields and in all stages of life, we are committed to bringing positive change in areas including education, the environment and health.

We understand and appreciate the financial responsibility of reducing the $14.5 billion dollar deficit and the government’s commitment to the people of Ontario to bring us into a balanced fiscal state.

We appreciate that there may be some unnecessary, duplicated and outdated regulations that could be eliminated to make business easier for corporations and developers.

However, Bill 66 is regressive because it puts the health of Ontario citizens at risk. Bill 66 allows municipalities, with ministerial approval, to pass “Open for Business” bylaws that would exempt cities and towns from sections of more than a dozen policies and acts, including critical sections of:

* the Greenbelt Act
* the Lake Simcoe Protection Act
* the Places to Grow Act
* the Great Lakes Protection Act
* the Clean Water Act

Bill 66 exempts developers from rules that are crucial to protecting human health. The Clean Water Act was established after the Walkerton water crisis where seven people died and 2,300 people fell ill when the town’s water supply became contaminated with E. coli in the year 2000. This bill threatens vital water sources for Ontarians, including Lake Simcoe and the Great Lakes and here in Waterloo Region we are even more vulnerable with our dependence on groundwater and the Grand River for all of our water needs. Many municipalities are located upstream of Cambridge, whose decisions could impact our health.

This Bill also proposes repealing the Toxic Reductions Act of 2009 that aims to prevent pollution and protect human health and the environment by reducing the use and creation of toxic substances and requires that Ontarians are informed about toxic substances. Given our Elmira water situation we are especially concerned about toxins in our local ecosystems.

Bill 66 impacts the Greenbelt and other land protection laws. The Greenbelt is home to farmland, forests, watersheds and wetlands. The Oak Ridges Moraine is the rain barrel of Ontario providing drinking water to over 250,000 Ontarians and feeding many river and streams that flow into Lake Ontario and Lake Simcoe.

The Greenbelt is economically important. Agriculture in the Greater Golden Horseshoe employs 38,000 people and gross output of farms is $11 billion, that’s $1.7 billion in tax revenue for all three levels of government. It was created in 2005 to deliberately limit the rapid urban sprawl that was encroaching on land that is both environmentally and economically significant. An important principal for insuring our food supply is to use low quality land for non-farm use. There is a limited supply of high quality farmland in Ontario.

Bill 66 undermines democracy. Our citizens expect to be involved in decisions about how and where development takes place. These are decisions that we make intentionally and democratically together. We expect communications and public meetings as well as having the ability to appeal bad decisions. If Bill 66 becomes law, the only notice residents would receive of an impeding development is when the first bulldozer arrives.

Bill 66 bypasses important regional planning and government. We count on the Region of Waterloo to ensure strong co-ordination and collaboration between all of our local municipalities. Bill 66 bypasses upper-tier governments completely rendering all of our regional planners, hydrologists and water experts, public health officials and many other important officials powerless as Bill 66 is solely between the lower-tier municipality and the Minister.

One of the mandates of CFUW Cambridge is to give voice to our members and their communities. The health of our city and province depends on valuing our farms, forests, clean water sources and nature and building robust and vibrant communities.

We are asking the Government of Ontario to stop interfering in local decision-making and disrupting the proven regulatory and planning systems already in place. Bill 66 imposes the provincial government’s political agenda on municipal decisions and under the guise of empowering local councils actually does the opposite by requiring the Minister to be involved in every decision under this Bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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