

Dear Ontario Mayors and Councillors,

As you are aware, there is growing **non-partisan advocacy** across this province calling for support of Bill 5- The Stopping Harassment and Abuse by Local Leaders Act - 'The Women of Ontario Say No'. This advocacy was borne out of a situation in Barrie, ON where a councillor was in litigation for sexual harassment while also running for Mayor, and Bill 5 itself is a result of the most appalling behaviour from a sitting councillor in Ottawa where council had no resource but to suspend pay for 90 days, four times.

There is an increasing number of municipalities in support (80 and growing DAILY), recognizing that this gap disproportionately affects women- and affects women in the most unconscionable ways. **Bill 5 was endorsed unanimously by the Ontario Big City Mayors a few weeks ago.** A list of current supporting municipalities can be found at the bottom of our home page [The Women of Ontario Support Bill 5 \(squarespace.com\)](#).

Workplace safety is the foundation to supporting diversity of voice at the decision-making tables. **A working environment free of harassment for all is not a big 'ask' - it is a right.** You may recall the names of two Ontario women, Lori Dupont and Theresa Vince, detailed in this article [Ont. workplace harassment laws change | CBC News](#) Both were murdered in the workplace by co-workers. As a result, Bill 168 was passed to strengthen Occupational Health and Safety legislation. Bill 5 is a natural progression to ensure health & safety in municipal workplaces for both employees **and** elected officials.

The Canadian Medical Association says this about workplace harassment "Bullying can cause **stress**, fatigue, presenteeism, anxiety, **burnout**, **depression**, substance abuse, broken **relationships**, early retirement and even **suicide**. It can affect performance, self-esteem/self-confidence, absenteeism and teamwork." <https://www.cma.ca/bullying-workplace>

Employers have a legal obligation to ensure psychologically safe workplaces. "A perfect legal storm is brewing in the area of mental health protection at work. This storm brings with it a rising tide of liability for employers in connection with failure to provide or maintain a psychologically safe workplace." Dr. Martin Shain see [PDF attachment Workforce Psychological Safety in the Workplace prepared for the Mental Health Commission of Canada](#).

From an article published in the National Post, Sept 2022 [Workplace bullying should be treated as a public health issue | National Post](#) "Multiple high profile incidents of workplace bullying have been in the media over the past few years, from the alleged toxic workplace culture created by former Governor General Julie Payette and the suicide of a Canadian Armed Forces reservist linked to constant harassment by co-workers..." "Like other health issues, the impact of workplace bullying has measurable diagnostic implications and the clustering of adverse physical and psychological symptoms of bullying victims is definable. Multiple studies have shown that it can negatively impact a person's mental health and can even lead to long-term psychological trauma.."

Multiple Ontario municipalities have learned the hard way about the lack of tools in the Municipal Act for holding councillors accountable for workplace harassment. Currently the most severe penalty that can be imposed on a municipal councillor is suspension of pay for 90 days. There is no process for removing councillors from office. This advocacy is not about upending our most sacred element of healthy societies- our democracy. **It about protecting the most basic of human rights for women, and all Ontarians. It is understood that that removal would only be pursued in the most egregious of circumstances, and even then, the courts would have to review the evidence and agree before removal would be enforced.** In fact, it is precisely the Bill's due process that has facilitated such rapid support.

There is discourse circulating that this legislation needs other elements. To that end, the legislation is in its infancy. Much of the worthy discussion on this will be captured in Committee and incorporated into regulation, if it passes second reading.

We NEED legislation now to address this shortcoming by amending the Municipal Act & City of Toronto Act to ensure (at a minimum): 1) municipally elected officials are accountable to violence and harassment in the workplace policies 2) there is a process for removal and restriction on re-election in cases where egregious acts of harassment are substantiated.

YOU have been elected to lead in our provincial municipalities and to represent the public's best interest. We are asking you to do just that. Human rights and the fundamental rights of women to work in an environment free of harassment can't wait. We are counting on you.

Sincerely,

Emily McIntosh
705-715-5018

Diane Noble
519 918 1966

On Behalf of
The Women of Ontario
Say No