

May 26, 2025

Submission on **Bill 5, An Act to enact the Special Economic Zones Act, 2025, to amend the Endangered Species Act, 2007 and to replace it with the Species Conservation Act, 2025, and to amend various Acts and revoke various regulations in relation to development and to procurement.** (Also known as Bill 5, Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, 2025)

The Toronto & York Region Labour Council represents more than 200,000 working people, who are members of over 150 locals and unions in the region, and who work in every sector of the economy. For reasons outlined below, **the Labour Council does not support passage of Bill 5, including all 10 of its Schedules.**

Following the unnecessary snap election earlier this year, as one of the first acts of this new government, this legislation - introduced by Stephen Lecce – tables policies that were not mentioned in the Conservative party's platform not were they mentioned by any of the Conservative candidates during the election campaign.

Among the wide-ranging powers included in Bill 5, Schedule 9 would allow the Ford government to create "special economic zones" anywhere in the province. Within these zones, the provincial government, through Cabinet-held secretive deliberations, can override all existing laws and regulations around labour conditions, employment standards, worker health and safety, and environmental protections, as well as municipal regulations. A zone can be created anywhere. While the expectation is that Bill 5 has to do with the "Ring of Fire", the reference to Ontario Place makes it clear the government could impose a "special economic zone" anywhere or everywhere. There are no remedies and no legal rights for anyone who is or may be negatively affected.

The other Schedules undermine Indigenous rights, environmental standards and climate action, public health, and local and province-wide democracy.

The Committee of the Interior has heard from numerous Ontarians who have made depositions and submissions about the full set of reasons for which Bill 5 should be withdrawn. The Committee process has been a rushed one with hearings only in Toronto, which signals clearly that the government intends to push this Bill through with the minimum of opportunity for clear consideration.

Omnibus bills are always challenging. Bill 5, which combines an omnibus approach with enormous and unquestionable powers for Cabinet, creates a nearly unprecedented level of threat to Ontario's workers and economy, democracy, environment, Indigenous communities, and public health. It excludes stakeholders and consolidates power in the hands of the Premier and Cabinet to act without any transparency. These powers allow them to act beyond the reach of our laws, purportedly to advance unregulated industrialization in the face of a trade war and economic uncertainty.

As others have noted, Ford's Government has already promoted many outdated industrial policies which are behind other global jurisdictions that are moving to decarbonize industry and economies. In the early days of this government in 2018, reckless steps were taken that reduced the move to new industries and economies. Bill 5 would speed up Ontario's path in the wrong direction, leaving us far behind. There was also similar exploitation of a crisis during COVID to pass Bill 197, which allowed MZOs to become more widespread and skip over environmental and other concerns

We have seen what happens when we experience unregulated and unbridled industrialization. In the late 19th century, the "Robber Barons" of the times amassed enormous profits while establishing monopolies, exploiting workers, destroying natural resources, and displacing Indigenous communities. We can expect that if Bill 5

proceeds, there will be a small number of winners and a large number of those who suffer from the consequences.

Then and now, this would mean slashing away science and evidence-informed decision making in consultation with experts. This would mean leaving aside the input and interests of the public, some of whom voted for Ford and his MPPs, and whose taxes will pay for whatever may happen. It would mean the absence of meaningful consultation with Indigenous peoples. It would mean that local democracy would be run over by Cabinet decisions with no clarity about who would benefit.

The labour council, in partnership with our union affiliates, has outlined seven urgent priorities for workers and our communities. If part of this government's goal is to protect Ontario workers during these turbulent times, we urge you to abandon Bill 5 in its entirety and instead work with your municipal and federal counterparts toward the priorities below:

1. **Expand Employment Insurance** – Reinstatement and expansion of the simplified EI program that existed between 2020 and 2022 thereby protecting workers affected by the trade war for the full duration of their displacement.
2. **“Made in Canada” matters** – Change public procurement policies to favour Canadian-made goods to help offset the impact of lower American purchasing of Canadian goods and stimulate domestic manufacturing in the long run.
3. **Bring in price controls** – Cap prices on food staples and essential goods to stop corporate price gouging. This will protect family budgets and make life more affordable.
4. **Build truly affordable housing** – Prioritize and reinstate programs to build public, co-operative, and other non-market housing. This will bring down the cost of housing and tackle the housing crisis.
5. **Fix our broken tax system and stop subsidizing fossil fuel corporations** – Restructure corporate taxes to fund affordable housing, hospitals, health care - including dental and pharmacare, \$10-a-day childcare, and the other public services Canadians count on.
6. **Build public infrastructure** – Instead of dismantling interprovincial trade rules that protect workers and public services, invest in public transit, green energy, rail, ports, cross-Canada highways, and public institutions.
7. **Status for all** – End the two-tiered citizenship and employment regime, which exploits workers and intensifies the big-business race to the bottom. Counter the reckless scapegoating of immigrants, foreign students, refugees, and others, which hides big business' role in the crisis.

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