

Good Afternoon,

On behalf of Cheryl Fort, Chair of the Northern Ontario Women's (NOW) Association, please be advised that at the NOW Association's General Membership Meeting held on October 29, 2025, the below resolution concerning the implementation of Bill 5 and the need to protect women's rights, leadership, and environmental health was formally passed.

Resolution: Ensuring Women's Leadership, Safety, and Well-being in Development Under Ontario Bill 5

Subject: Upholding Women's Rights, Leadership, and Environmental Health in the Implementation of Ontario Bill 5

WHEREAS The Government of Ontario has passed Bill 5, Protect Ontario by Unleashing Our Economy Act, 2025, aiming to facilitate and accelerate resource development in Northern Ontario; and

WHEREAS Bill 5 presents far-reaching implications for municipalities, First Nations, and Indigenous communities across Northern Ontario—particularly affecting natural ecosystems and regions where women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people have historically borne the brunt of unchecked development and continue to face systemic disparities and heightened risks tied to resource extraction; and

WHEREAS Women are too often included in economic and development decisions as an afterthought, rather than as proactive and central stakeholders, despite their increasing presence in leadership across municipalities, First Nations governments, community services, and economic development organizations; and

WHEREAS The Northern Ontario Women's Association (NOW Association) was founded to ensure that the voices of women—who increasingly occupy leadership roles in municipal councils, First Nations governance, and community planning—are respected, protected, and embedded in all regional development initiatives; and

WHEREAS First Nations of Ontario women continue to be underrepresented at decision-making tables, despite significant leadership: as of recent reports, women hold over 35% of elected Chief positions in First Nations of Ontario, and significantly more leadership positions within community organizations, health, and education boards - positions that bring deep experience in balancing development with community well-being; and

WHEREAS The legacy of natural resource development in Northern Ontario has contributed to environmental degradation and social disruption, including clear links to the ongoing crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S); and

WHEREAS The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S) identified extractive industries as a key contributor to increased vulnerability to violence, especially in isolated development zones lacking oversight and safeguards; and

WHEREAS Resource extraction has historically contributed to environmental degradation, increased cost-of-living, housing instability, and elevated levels of gender-based violence, particularly in rural and remote areas; and

WHEREAS Without gender-based and culturally informed planning, development under Bill 5 risks reproducing the same harmful patterns of exclusion, exploitation, and environmental harm that have characterized previous waves of resource development; and

WHEREAS Development under Bill 5 also presents opportunities for women's economic empowerment—including entry into skilled trades, environmental monitoring, and leadership roles in infrastructure and project planning—if such pathways are made intentional, accessible, and equitable; and

WHEREAS Environmental degradation is directly linked to the health and well-being of women and children, particularly in remote and Indigenous communities where access to clean water, healthy food systems, and cultural practices are tied to land-based knowledge; and

WHEREAS The Province of Ontario has an obligation to ensure that economic growth is not achieved at the expense of women's safety, human rights, or environmental integrity.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT The Northern Ontario Women's Association calls on the Province of Ontario to:

1. Ensure that women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people—particularly from Indigenous and Northern communities—are actively engaged at the forefront of all planning, consultation, and implementation processes under Bill 5, from concept to completion;
2. Establish a dedicated Ministerial role or mandate for overseeing and safeguarding women's rights, safety, and economic opportunity throughout the resource development process, including authority to apply gender-based impact assessments to proposed projects;
3. Mandate gender-based and intersectional impact assessments be carried out on all developments enabled by Bill 5, particularly with regard to safety, housing, transportation, healthcare access, and cultural impacts on women and girls;
4. Ensure environmental protections are explicitly tied to community health outcomes, especially for women and children, by investing in environmental monitoring and enforcing strong environmental safeguards tied to traditional ecological knowledge and include community-led, land-based health indicators;
5. Invest in training, apprenticeship, and leadership programs to ensure women and girls—particularly those in remote, Indigenous, and underserved communities—can access opportunities in the skilled trades, environmental sciences, project management, and public service tied to resource development;
6. Recognize and act on the findings of the MMIWG2S Inquiry by implementing protective measures around development zones, including funding for shelters, safe transportation, trauma-informed care, community safety initiatives, and anti-violence strategies embedded in community agreements;
7. Publish annual, public-facing progress reports on the gendered impacts of development under Bill 5, including employment statistics, leadership inclusion, environmental outcomes, and indicators of community safety and wellness; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT This resolution be forwarded to the Premier of Ontario, the Minister of Energy and Mines, the Minister of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation, the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, FONOM, NOMA, as well as all Northern Ontario municipalities and First Nations governments.

Motion: Sally Hagman

Second: Melanie Pilon

CARRIED

The Northern Ontario Women's Association (NOW) is a group of local elected officials in Northern Ontario who identify as women, and who want to lead the conversation on priorities and issues that are directly affecting women in the northern region. NOW's membership includes women with diverse professional backgrounds in economic development, locomotive engineering, skilled trades training, health care, employment services, marketing, business management, and more. Many have multi-year experience on municipal council.

Alana Torresan (she/her)
Deputy Clerk

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