Submission to

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE DOUGLAS FORD

Premier of Ontario By

THE BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL WOMEN OF ONTARIO

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Working towards improving economic, political, social, and employment conditions for women in Ontario

"Connect – Collaborate – Commit"

Member of:
The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada)

The International Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW International)

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INTRODUCTION

The Business and Professional Women of Ontario (BPW Ontario) is a non-partisan and non-sectarian organization which represents dedicated working women across Ontario. Our members represent a diverse group of women working in public and private sector, industry, and the professions.

Our members meet monthly to discuss issues relevant to women. Being part of BPW Ontario means each member also enjoys the privilege of membership in the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada) and the International Federation of Business and Professional Women (IFBPW) which were both founded in 1930. The International Federation of Business and Professional Women has members in over 100 countries around the world and maintains Consultative Status in the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Since 2016, BPW Ontario continues to use the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals to empower women. We continue to work in collaboration with BPW International, BPW Canada, and the United Nations' and other likeminded organizations across the province seeking gender equality.
Since 1910, BPW Ontario has promoted the interests of working women by making submissions to government regarding issues such as closing the gender wage gap, employment equity, childcare, health issues, and other areas of concern to women. BPW Ontario promotes equality as a basic human right.

This year at our annual general meeting, BPW Ontario discussed the issues of women's health screening and diagnostic testing, gender equity in AI, a free contraceptive plan, declaring intimate partner violence an epidemic and encouraging women's participation and leadership in municipal politics.

BPW Ontario looks forward to the opportunity to discuss the resolutions in this brief and find ways we can work collaboratively to positively impact the lives of women in Ontario.

Respectfully submitted,

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RESOLUTION 2026-01 – Improving Timely Access to Women's Health Screening and Diagnostic Testing in Ontario

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Business and Professional Women of Ontario (BPW Ontario) urges the Government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Health, to:

1. Establish and publicly report provincial performance benchmarks and annual disaggregated data for women's health screening and diagnostic services, including screening participation, diagnostic turnaround times, follow-up care, and health outcomes by income, geography, race, and immigration status, in order to identify inequities, monitor progress, and improve timely access to care.
2. Review and strengthen screening intervals, follow-up protocols, and province-wide clinical guidance for cervical and breast cancer screening programs, ensuring that clinical need rather than administrative timelines guides testing frequency and follow-up care for high-risk populations.
3. Develop and implement a coordinated province-wide outreach, education, reminder, and notification strategy, including culturally and linguistically appropriate communication, to improve equitable access to women's health screening and diagnostic services for marginalized, newcomer, rural, remote, and underserved communities.

Rationale

Despite Ontario's publicly funded cancer screening programs, participation in key women's health screenings remains below provincial targets, and inequities in access persist:

- Ontario's latest performance report shows that only about 61% of eligible women were up to date with cervical screening (Ontario Health, 2024), and breast cancer screening participation was similarly at 61.1%, both below recommended targets for optimal prevention.
- The Ontario Cancer Screening Performance Report (2023) documents that participation and follow-up after abnormal results were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with noticeable disparities among populations in materially deprived and ethnically concentrated neighbourhoods (Ontario Health, 2023).
- Research indicates that cervical screening uptake is lower among newcomer and ethnic minority women, with South Asian women in Ontario showing lower participation due to barriers including language, cultural stigma, and access to providers (Parveen, S., et al., 2025).
- Structural barriers—including limited awareness of how screening programs work, difficulty accessing providers, inconvenient clinic hours, transportation challenges, and cultural or language obstacles—contribute to inequitable access (Partnership Against Cancer, 2023).
- Ontario implemented HPV testing province-wide in March 2025 to replace cytology (Pap) testing as the primary screening method. HPV testing is more accurate for detecting pre-cancerous changes, but this shift requires clear communication and education to ensure equitable uptake (Government of Ontario, 2025).

Timely screening and diagnostic follow-up are proven to reduce incidence and mortality from cervical and breast cancers. However, delays in follow-up, inconsistent notifications, and inequitable access contribute to later detection and poorer outcomes among women, particularly those in marginalized, rural, remote, and newcomer communities.

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RESOLUTION 2026-02 – Eliminating Gender Bias in Artificial Intelligence for Women in Ontario

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Business and Professional Women of Ontario (BPW Ontario) urge the Government of Ontario to amend Bill 194 to explicitly require regulations to cover certain core elements that must be included concerning cybersecurity, privacy and the use of AI systems**,** to inclusively protect the rights of women, racialized workers, and marginalized groups, and with the provision of funding to create a public consultation process.

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that the Business and Professional Women of Ontario (BPW Ontario) urges the Government of Ontario to legislate that Private Sector companies be required to comply with these regulations

Rationale

This resolution is to call on the Government of Ontario to strengthen its guidance, oversight and regulations on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to proactively help improve political, social and employment conditions for women in a safe and equitable environment. AI and automation are rapidly transforming Canada's labour market. Research from the International Labour Organization (ILO) shows that 9.6% of jobs primarily held by women are at high risk of AI-driven displacement, nearly three times the rate of jobs in male-dominated sectors (ILO, 2024; Farge, 2024). In Canada, these roles are concentrated in clerical, administrative, and customer service occupations (Statistics Canada, 2023).
The Provincial government has passed legislation such as Bill 194, Strengthening Cyber Security and Building Trust in the Public Sector Act (Bill 194, 2024), to regulate cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and children's digital information. Bill 194 amends the provincial *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and introduces the new *Enhancing Digital Security and Trust Act, 2024.* Together, these legislative changes create significant new obligations for Ontario's public sector institutions concerning cybersecurity, privacy, and the use of AI systems. Additionally, the Digital Security Act introduces specific obligations for children's aid societies, school boards, and institutions governed by Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) and its municipal counterpart, including Regulations for Enhanced cybersecurity and cyber resilience requirements, Regulation of the use of AI systems by public institutions, and Stronger protections for children's personal information processed by school boards and children's aid societies.

However, it has not set clear statutory guardrails for public sector use of AI, leaving it for future regulations. AI is already transforming public services in Ontario, shaping decisions in health care, education, and social services. Without intentional oversight, AI risks reinforcing systemic inequalities, disproportionately affecting women, racialized workers, and marginalized groups.

The Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario's written submission on Bill 194 (IPC, 2024) made recommendations to strengthen Bill 194 concerning levels of accountability, transparency, and oversight, and fill gaps in the regulatory framework, including, for example:

- 3: Require a prescribed public consultation process, such as a task force, to monitor and address the gendered and intersectional impacts of AI across Ontario's workforce
- 10: Strengthen Schedule 1 by codifying clear statutory principles to serve as guardrails around the responsible use of AI systems by the public sector to provide necessary assurances to earn and maintain Ontarians' trust in the use of AI systems against gender bias. Trishan Panch et. al. (2019). To be safe and configured to support human life, physical and mental, have privacy by design protection to mitigate privacy risks to individuals and groups;

- 11: Adopt a risk-based framework whereby rules and obligations on organizations developing or deploying AI systems are more or less exacting, depending on the level of risk or potential harm to individuals and groups. As examples, the European Union AI Act (EU, 2024) assess the potential impact and likelihood of harm associated with different AI systems, ensuring that AI systems with a higher risk of unintended harm receive more stringent oversight than those classified as lower risk AI systems, including an explicit statutory list of prohibited uses.
- Strengthen privacy protection for Ontario's children

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2026-03 Reaffirm Resolution 2024-06: Moving to a Free Prescription Contraceptive Plan in Ontario

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Business and Professional Women of Ontario (BPW Ontario) reaffirms Resolution 2024-06 which states "**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Business and Professional Women of Ontario (BPW Ontario) strongly urges the Government of Ontario, specifically the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services, the Minister of Health, and the Associate Minister of Women's Social and Economic Opportunity, to work closely with the Government of Canada on its national universal pharmacare so free prescription contraceptives will be available to all women of reproductive age in Ontario."

Rationale

Prior to the provincial election on February 27, 2025, the Government of Ontario did not take steps to negotiate with the Government of Canada to make an agreement for funding under the *PharmaCare Act*, which came into force on October 10, 2024 **(PharmaCare)**.

After a federal election was held on April 28, 2025, in his budget tabled in Parliament November 4, 2025, Prime Minister Carney did not increase funding for the *PharmaCare Act* but did protect the current pharmacare program **(2025 Budget)**.

The provincial government has not taken any further steps to enhance its limited contraceptive program, neither through further provincial legislation to increase OHIP benefits, nor to begin negotiations with the Government of Canada to receive funding for contraceptives under their *PharmaCare Act* program.

It is time to remind the Government of Ontario about the need to work with the Government of Canada to enable pharmacare, and especially the free contraceptives portion of the pharmacare program, to be implemented in Ontario at the earliest opportunity.

References

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2026-04 The Province of Ontario Must Declare Intimate Partner Violence an Epidemic

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED the Business and Professional Women of Ontario urges the Government of Ontario, specifically the Ministry of the Attorney General, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism, Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs, Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and First Nations Economic Reconciliation, Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Ministry of Northern Development and Growth, Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement, Ministry of Seniors and Accessibility, and Ministry of the Solicitor General, to move Bill 55 *Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act, 2025* through the legislative process quickly.

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED that once Bill 55, *Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act, 2025*, is passed, the subsequent legislative and regulatory processes must be undertaken immediately, with all required amendments enacted without delay.

Rationale

On March 7, 2024, Bill 173 *Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act 2024* was brought to the floor of the provincial legislature; it carried at the First Reading and subsequently was debated and carried at the Second Reading on April 10, 2024. The status of Bill 173 reached "Ordered referred to Standing Committee on Justice Policy" (**Legislative Assembly of Ontario, April 2024**).

Premier Ford dissolved the Provincial Government on January 28, 2025, which resulted in a provincial election on February 27, 2025. At that time all work on Bill 173 died. The result of the election was a majority Progressive Conservative government with Doug Ford leading again as Premier (**Election Data, 2025**).

On June 5, 2025, First Reading of Bill 55, *Intimate Partner Violence Epidemic Act, 2025* was carried and ordered for Second Reading. Currently, there is no date for the Second Reading. Bill 55 differs from Bill 173 in that Bill 55 not only asks for the Province of Ontario to declare intimate partner violence (IPV) an epidemic, but it also includes provisions to:

> "(a) consider the 86 recommendations issued in June 2022 by the Office of the Chief Coroner's Jury Inquest into the Renfrew County triple femicide of 2015 and determine steps for implementing the recommendations; and
> (b) monitor the progress the Government of Ontario subsequently makes on implementing the Committee's recommendations." (**Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2025**).

Statistics in Ontario on intimate partner violence (IPV) continue to cause alarm. Every month, there are women from Ontario on the list of IPV Victims published by the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability (**CFOJA, 2026**). Data from the Province of Ontario website on IPV states that more women and children experience IPV, but information such as statistics and links used on the site are archived (**IPV, Ontario**).

It has been more than three years since recommendations to deal with IPV were issued in June 2022, and it is time that the Province of Ontario declares IPV an epidemic and begins implementing those recommendations, starting with declaring intimate partner violence an epidemic.

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2026-05 Encouraging Women's Participation and Leadership in Municipal Politics

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that BPW Ontario urges the Government of Ontario, municipalities, and post-secondary institutions to take coordinated action to:

1. Develop and fund women-focused leadership and candidate-readiness programs; Expand mentorship, internships, and experiential learning opportunities in municipal governance;
2. Strengthen youth and women's advisory committees and reduce structural barriers to participation through accessible and family-friendly practices;
3. Collect and publish gender-disaggregated data on municipal candidates and elected officials; and
4. Promote municipal politics as an inclusive and viable leadership pathway for young women.

Rationale

Women remain underrepresented in municipal elected office across Ontario, despite comprising more than half of the population. Municipal councils and mayors exercise significant influence over housing, land use, transportation, climate resilience, recreation, and local economic development. Yet, these decision-making bodies do not reflect the diversity of the communities they serve (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2023).

Research indicates that women—particularly younger women and women from equity-deserving groups- face systemic barriers to entering municipal politics, including limited access to mentorship, campaign training, financial resources, and family-friendly political environments (Equal Voice Canada, 2022; Samara Centre for Democracy, 2020). These barriers contribute to persistent gaps in representation and reduce the pipeline of women candidates for municipal leadership.

Canada is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which obligates governments to ensure women's equal participation in political and public life (United Nations, 1979). At the national level, the Government of Canada has adopted Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) to advance gender equity in public policy. At the same time, the Government of Ontario has committed to promoting inclusion and equity through its Women's Strategy and Anti-Racism Strategy (Government of Ontario, 2023).

With the 2026 Ontario Municipal Election approaching, there is a timely opportunity to strengthen pathways for women, particularly college and university-aged women, to view municipal politics as an accessible and meaningful route to leadership and public service. Increasing women's participation in municipal governance aligns with BPW Ontario's mandate to improve the economic, political, and social conditions of women across the province.

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