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Date of submission April 18, 2025		
Title of Resolution Ontario Seniors' Advocate		
RESOLVED, That CFUW Ontario Council urge the Government of Ontario to establish and fund a Seniors' Advocate who is an independent officer of the legislature, with a primary focus on the aging in place experience, with the following mandate: • to solicit and receive input from the public regarding challenges and successes with maximizing quality of life experienced by the people of Ontario as they age, including but not limited to barriers to their ability to age in place; • to collaborate with Ombudsman Ontario and Patient Ombudsman to identify trends in complaints received by those offices about challenges to quality of life experienced by Ontarians as they age; • to monitor the impact of provincial policy and legislation on the experience of aging in Ontario; • to collect relevant data and provide public reports annually to the legislature about the advocate's activities and recommendations to address systemic challenges Ontarians experience with maximizing quality of life as they age, prioritizing recommendations to help the people of Ontario age in place that recognize diverse demographic variables, including but not limited to regional location and income.		
Background: CFUW National passed a resolution in 2024 calling on all levels of government to collaborate to support people to age in place: aging in their own homes in their communities (CFUW, 2024). This resolution was based on data about two trends in the aging experience in Canada: i) 90% of Canadians aged 45 and older want to age in homes rather than relocate to long-term care homes (CFUW, 2024); and, ii) aging in homes and community settings is more cost effective for governments than moving people to long-term care homes (CFUW, 2024). The National Seniors Council (2024) highlighted the multiple complex systems that contribute to an individual's ability to age in place and otherwise experience quality of life in the aging process in Canada: prosperity, health, society, environment, and good governance. The Ontario government needs a mechanism to consolidate information about the multiple facets of aging to support the people of Ontario to maximize their quality of life while aging, including aging in place as much as possible. An advocate role is a viable and influential mechanism for centralizing information and creating action plans to support quality of life for an aging population as demonstrated by the effectiveness of other advocate roles with stimulating systemic reforms as outlined below.		

Seniors' Advocate in British Columbia

The Office of the Seniors' Advocate for British Columbia ("OSA") is independent of government and has highlighted problems with public services adversely impacting older adults that led to government reforms of various systems in British Columbia (Shaw, 2024). One of the reasons the OSA has been so effective with promoting changes in services for seniors is that the OSA collects data that highlights systemic issues that would not have been identified otherwise (Shafi, 2023). For example, the OSA completed a robust analysis of income inequality among seniors that revealed almost half of seniors live below a full-time minimum wage income (Shafi, 2023). This reality was previously obscured by a small fraction of seniors with very high incomes driving up the mean income for seniors in the province (Shafi, 2023).

Seniors' Advocate in Newfoundland and Labrador

The independent Seniors' Advocate in Newfoundland and Labrador has achieved similar success to the OSA in British Columbia with stimulating change in government policy to support seniors. The government at least partially implemented 88% of the recommendations issued by the Office of the Seniors Advocate Newfoundland and Labrador from its inception to 2023 (Shafi, 2023). Recommendations fully implemented include expansion of age-friendly communities and improvements in housing options for seniors (Shafi, 2023).

Ontario Child and Youth Advocate—eliminated in 2018

The Ontario Child and Youth Advocate was independent of the government and engaged in activities leading to increases in the rights of children and youth in the child welfare system in Ontario (Hancock, 2020). Multiple organizations protested the elimination of Ontario's Child and Youth Advocate role in 2018, noting that the organizations relied on the Advocate to inform them about systemic reforms required for young people that they could implement and champion (Campaign 2000: End Child and Family Poverty in Canada et al., n.d.). Concerns about the loss of the Child and Youth Advocate, and the success of the role in achieving legislative reform, demonstrate the value of creating an independent advocate role to identify necessary policy, legal, and other systemic reforms to support vulnerable people.

Dimensions of a Seniors' Advocate Role for Ontario

These examples of advocacy roles created by governments across Canada, including the Ontario government, highlight that advocate roles are particularly effective in moving forward systemic reforms to improve living conditions for people in a jurisdiction where the advocate role is independent of government and focused on a specific population.

The proposed seniors' advocate role for Ontario meets both of these criteria. The advocate will be independent of government so that the advocate's work is not influenced by partisan political considerations. The advocate role will also have a focused mandate of addressing systemic issues related to quality of life while aging with priority given to the aspect of quality of life of aging in place.

An aging in place mandate is a broader focus for a seniors' advocate than the role proposed for a seniors' advocate by the New Democratic Party in 2020 and 2023 (Bill 196, Seniors Advocate Act, 2020; Bill 101, Advocate for Older Adults Act, 2023). Both of the defeated bills proposed by the NDP to create a seniors' advocate focused specifically on seniors and family members who provide care to seniors (Bill 196, Seniors Advocate Act, 2020; Bill 101, Advocate for Older Adults Act, 2023).

Prioritizing aging in place rather than seniors and their family caregivers could promote social cohesion between generations while supporting seniors because aging in place promotes both quality of life for older people and fiscal responsibility for governments (CFUW, 2024; National Seniors Council, 2024). Younger people concerned about the financial burden of supporting an aging population might be more interested in supporting an advocate focused on the fiscally responsible strategy of aging in place rather than an advocate focused on serving seniors generally.

Existing Organizations Serving Seniors are Limited in Scope

Ontario needs a Seniors' Advocate independent of government to maximize quality of life in the aging experience in Ontario because existing organizations that address issues related to aging have limited mandates that preclude them from comprehensively advocating for the best aging experience possible in Ontario. Those organizations are the Patient Ombudsman, Ombudsman Ontario, Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, and Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility.

The Patient Ombudsman's mandate is to address concerns about health care services (Patient Ombudsman, 2025). Ombudsman Ontario's mandate is to address concerns about government and public sector organizations (Ombudsman Ontario, 2025). Neither Ombudsman Ontario nor the Patient Ombudsman prioritize an aging lens when investigating concerns received from the public.

Conversely, the Advocacy Centre for the Elderly (2025) focuses on an aging perspective in its work. However, the organization only addresses legal issues (Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, 2025) which is just one dimension of the aging experience.

The mandate of the provincial Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility is missing the element of gathering concerns from the public involved in the work of the aforementioned organizations and the proposed Seniors' Advocate. The Ministry's focus related to seniors is providing information about services and promoting social participation and recognition of the contributions of seniors (Government of Ontario, 2024).

A Seniors' Advocate role is needed given that none of the existing organizations related to seniors in Ontario fulfill the roles proposed for the Advocate. The Seniors' Advocate would have a niche function gathering concerns about all dimensions of the aging experience in Ontario and using that information to formulate actions to maximize the quality of that experience.

Implementation:

The goal of this resolution is to support an aging population by proposing an independent Seniors' Advocate. The advocate would analyze systemic barriers Ontarians experience to maximizing their quality of life while they age. An independent Seniors' Advocate will be able to assemble the data the government needs to implement policies and legislation to facilitate aging in place programs at the local level as per the CFUW (2024) national resolution and thereby promote quality of life in the aging experience in Ontario. A priority should be placed on addressing barriers to aging in place.

With this resolution in place, CFUW Ontario Council would be empowered to ask for support from the Ministers and Premier for establishment of a Seniors' Advocate. Letters as well as personal meetings with Ministers are suggested. CFUW Ontario Council could approach potential partners in this sector to add their support for establishment of an independent Seniors' Advocate. Letters and petitions from Ontario Council, partners in the seniors' sector and Ontario CFUW clubs are suggested as possible follow-up actions.

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