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Commitment to Bill 20 Amendments A Step in the Right Direction for RMA

Nisku, AB, May 2, 2024 – Earlier today, Minister of Municipal Affairs Ric McIver released a statement committing to amending Bill 20: *Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024* to address the unwarranted provincial overstep into municipal democracy that was included in the initial version of the bill. The RMA appreciates the Minister’s commitment to amending the bill in collaboration with municipalities.

“In its initial form, Bill 20 was a blatant example of provincial over-reach into municipal decision-making and democracy. The RMA’s reaction to Bill 20 was blunt and to the point: it was unnecessary, over-the-top, and insulting to democratically elected municipal leaders. It appears that Minister McIver has listened and is willing to work with the RMA and other municipal stakeholders to ensure that Bill 20 will not infringe on the ability of municipal councillors to make decisions within their scope of authority,” commented RMA President Paul McLauchlin. “While engagement on such controversial and impactful changes to provincial-municipal relations should have occurred long before a bill was drafted and tabled, we do give the Minister credit for listening to our concerns and coming to the table.”

The RMA’s priority will continue to be for amendments to completely remove Bill 20 provisions allowing Cabinet to remove councillors and amend bylaws for any reason. If this is not possible, the RMA will push for tight restrictions around the cases in which both powers can be utilized.

“While the Minister has emphasized that Bill 20 is about making municipal councillors more accountable to their constituents, our concern is with the complete lack of accountability that Cabinet would face for using Bill 20 powers to interfere with local governance and decision-making,” explained McLauchlin. “If the Government of Alberta insists on keeping Cabinet’s ability to remove councillors and repeal bylaws proposed in the bill, they absolutely must be scoped in a way that ensures they will deal only with extraordinary circumstances and cannot be weaponized or politicized by the current or future provincial governments to interfere in legitimate municipal decisions they don’t like.”

The RMA expects to hear from the Minister's office shortly to clarify next steps in working together on amendments to the Act. To the Minister's credit, he has been responsive to the RMA's concerns with Bill 20, and we are confident that we can work together to reach an outcome that addresses the province's priorities while letting municipal councillors do their job.

"The RMA views the province and Minister McIver as partners. While we have different roles and different views on how to get things done, we know that working together is going to produce better outcomes than pushing against one another. While Bill 20 placed strain on that partnership, the Minister's willingness to listen to and act on our concerns is encouraging," explained McLaughlin. "While we don't yet know what the Bill 20 amendments will look like, we feel heard by the Minister and we are cautiously optimistic this issue will be resolved in a way that works for the province and RMA members."