

CAPTIJN: Missed opportunity to fix a broken system

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A worker

builds a new home. PHOTO BY STOCK PHOTO /Getty Images

The Ford government is on the verge of passing Bill 159, the “Rebuilding Consumer Confidence Act,” which purports to overhaul Tarion Warranty Corporation, the secretive \$400-million arm’s-length agency of the Ontario government.

Despite the bill’s sales pitch title and promises by Consumer Minister Lisa Thompson for a complete transformation, consumers at two separate committee hearings in January and June of this year were clearly not feeling the love.

The Ontario Home Builders’ Association president, on the other hand, one of the only supporters of the bill to speak at committee hearings, pronounced Tarion “a good system.”

Any time a well-funded, politically connected lobby group says something is good for consumers, that should be a red flag.

Why did the Progressive Conservative government bring a bill at all if they have little interest in fixing the decades-old Tarion problem? Why not accept any amendments proposed by the opposition and consumer advocates?

Premier Doug Ford seems to want to look like he's doing something, anything, after the hard-hitting 2019 auditor general's report revealing that Tarion executives were incentivized to minimize payouts to homeowners to increase profits, didn't fix 65% of warranted defects between 2014-18, and neither did builders, continued to license builders with poor records, gave builders a disproportionate influence over policy-making, and had often not acted in the "spirit and intent" of the governing legislation.

To say the fox has been in charge of the hen house is an understatement.

Decades of consumer complaints to the consumer ministry regarding Tarion were given legitimacy by the auditor's critical report. But building more homes faster, and cutting red tape for builders, has taken a front seat since the beginning of Ford's tenure.

It's hard to find a government agency other than Tarion that has caused so much financial and emotional hardship for consumers, cost more taxpayer dollars to investigate, caused more private member's bills to be brought to the legislature, yet yielded so little in real protection for the approximately 60,000 Ontarians who buy a new home each year.

Instead of following the road map for a complete overhaul as set out in Justice J. Douglas Cunningham's Tarion review in 2017, this government has chosen the long and winding road of more smokescreen consultations, spending more taxpayer dollars, more platitudes about transformations, more chasing sidewalks for all of us, while industry lobby groups sit at every intersection telling us they're all for consumer protection.