



Connection

Ontario's sixth ombudsman takes charge



John Mossa, Independent Living Skills Trainer, Centre for Independent Living in Toronto, was a guest at the 2005 Ombudsman Ontario Open House held at the end of June. Mr. Mossa was welcomed by the Ombudsman of Ontario, André Marin.

André Marin officially took over his duties as Ontario's sixth Ombudsman on April 1, 2005. He brings to the Ombudsman's office a highly respected and extensive background in oversight of public institutions.

Upon his appointment, Mr. Marin immediately set out to redefine how the Ombudsman's office conducts its business to ensure that the office maximizes its value to the citizens of



Ontario. In May he released a report titled, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place," which was issued following the conclusion of the first field investigation undertaken by the Ombudsman of Ontario in decades. The findings of the investigation, and Mr. Marin's recommendations concerning whether parents of children with special needs were being forced to turn over custody of their children to the Children's Aid Society,



The Hon. Alvin Curling, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, looks on as André Marin signs the Oath of Office during the swearing-in ceremony.

prompted the Provincial Government to immediately implement important improvements in how it deals with children with special needs and their families. In June, Mr. Marin hosted an Open House for representatives of community organizations. Over 270 people attended the event.

Prior to his appointment as Ontario's Provincial Ombudsman, Mr. Marin served as Canada's first Ombudsman for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces for six-and-a-half years. During that time, he was responsible for the investigation of complaints from those serving in the Canadian military and identified systemic issues and issued recommendations to ensure accountability, transparency and the integration of ethics into Canada's military.

Mr. Marin served as Director of the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) of the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General from 1996 to 1998. The SIU is an independent, civilian agency mandated to maintain public confidence in Ontario's police services by ensuring police actions resulting in serious injury or death are subjected to rigorous, independent investigations. Responsible for overseeing the actions of Ontario police officers, he earned a reputation for conducting thorough independent investigations into highly sensitive matters.

"I believe the Ombudsman has the responsibility to influence and effect positive social change," Mr. Marin explained. "My priority as Ontario's Ombudsman is to ensure that the rights of all Ontarians will be vigorously upheld and that the Ontario government will provide fair and accountable service to its citizens."



The Hon. Mary Anne Chambers, Minister of Children and Youth Services met with Ombudsman André Marin in July.

Case summaries

Ministry of Energy

Hydro One Networks Inc.

Ms D is a resident of a remote community in Ontario. She contacted our office extremely upset because her hydro had been cut off. It was September; she was seven months pregnant and had a three-year-old child whose bronchitis flares up in cold weather. She is alone in the home most of the time, as her husband works in the bush and is away for long periods. Ms D explained that she had paid the outstanding hydro account but her hydro had not been restored. Hydro One had told her that she could pay \$500 to have the power reactivated immediately or wait until the second week of October, when a staff member would be in her community. Ms D said that it was hard enough to pay her hydro on a regular basis and she did not have an extra \$500 to pay for reconnection. An Ombudsman Representative contacted Hydro One to discuss Ms D's case. Shortly after our contact and as a result of our alerting Hydro One to Ms D's circumstances, her hydro was restored when Hydro One responded to an urgent call in her community.

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP)

Ms D is the daughter of an elderly non-English-speaking couple. She explained that her father suffers from Alzheimer's Disease and that her mother is his only caregiver. Ms D

noted that both her parents needed to renew their health cards but, given her father's medical condition, he was unable to wait for hours in an OHIP office.

An Ombudsman Representative contacted the Ministry to discuss the situation. The Ministry advised that the father's physician could complete a photo and signature exemption request form, which would allow Ms D and her mother to attend an OHIP office to renew the cards without her father having to have a photo taken or sign his card. The Ombudsman Representative discussed this option with Ms D, who noted that it would be difficult because this would require her mother to leave her father with a neighbour. Ms D asked if it would be possible to schedule an appointment with the Ministry to minimize the length of time her mother would be away. The Ombudsman Representative spoke with Ministry staff again, to try to resolve the situation. Following this intervention, the Ministry agreed to automatically renew both OHIP cards.

Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology

Ms X complained to our office that, with a grade point average (GPA) of 7.7, she was found ineligible for the Queen Elizabeth II Aiming for the Top Scholarship in her second year of University. According to her school, she had not met the OSAP's guideline for the Scholarship program of maintaining an average of 80 per cent or its equivalent in GPA or letter

grades. The University used a 9 point GPA system under which A+ is 9 (90-100 per cent), A is 8 (80-89 per cent), and B+ is 7 (75-79 per cent). Ms X claimed that she had the equivalent of an average of 80 per cent, but that the University's method of calculating eligibility was inconsistent with the OSAP guideline. The Ministry had accepted the University's calculation. When the Ministry was notified of our intent to investigate Ms X's case, its position was that institutions are responsible for determining grades and it could not interfere in this process. In the course of the investigation, however, the Ministry released an interpretive bulletin to assist institutions in determining what would constitute an average of at least 80 per cent or its equivalent in GPA or letter grades. After receiving this bulletin, the University changed its requirement for maintaining the Scholarship to a 7.6 GPA. Following our investigation, the Ombudsman recommended that the Ministry pay Ms X an amount equivalent to what she would have received in Scholarship funding to the completion of her program, and that the Ministry consult with institutional associations to determine the appropriate equivalency for the purpose of the Scholarship program. The Ministry agreed with the Ombudsman's recommendations.

These cases are from Ombudsman Ontario's 2004-2005 Annual Report. A complete copy of the Annual Report can be found on our website at: www.ombudsman.on.ca. To have a copy or CD version mailed to you, please call 416-586-3353.

mission

STATEMENT

Working to ensure fair and accountable provincial government service

Our Values

Ombudsman Ontario is guided by the following values in its interactions with its staff, the public and government:

Fairness: treating everyone in a reasonable, equitable and impartial manner

Accountability: providing quality services, taking responsibility, evaluating and improving through innovation

Integrity: demonstrating transparent, honest and ethical practices

Respect: understanding individual differences and valuing diversity

Contact information

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1-866-411-4211 – TTY, hard of hearing
and deaf

1-866-863-2560 – Fax

416-586-3300 – Toronto

416-586-3485 – Toronto Fax

Website: www.ombudsman.on.ca

For general information, comments
on this newsletter or mailing
address changes, please call our
Communications Office at
416-586-3353.

*If your organization or umbrella group would like to learn more about Ombudsman Ontario, our **Community Education Program** staff would be pleased to facilitate an information session. Using overhead slides or a PowerPoint presentation and encouraging questions throughout, we will explain how we help people resolve their problems with provincial government organizations. Participants*

*will learn about the philosophy of the Ombudsman, how to complain to us, our most common referrals, as well as the most common types of complaints. We will provide handouts of the presentation and info kits to all participants. For further information or to book an information session, call Judith Klie, **Community Education Program**, 416-586-3357.*

Who We Are

Ombudsman Ontario helps people resolve problems by investigating complaints they have with provincial government organizations. The office cannot deal with matters regarding federal or municipal government, the courts and the private sector. Ombudsman Ontario is independent of the government and is generally a place of last resort when other approaches to resolve complaints have been tried. Complaints can be made in writing, by telephone, e-mail, TTY, fax or by cassette recording. Services are free and confidential.

About our logo

This is the symbol for Ombudsman Ontario. The “O” stands for our name. The three sets of arms come together: one each for the public, the government and our office.



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