

Ombudsman's Office on the move

The bright modern Bell Trinity Square at 483 Bay Street, in the heart of Toronto's business district, is the new home of the Ombudsman of Ontario.

On January 27, 2006, staff moved out of the 98-year-old historic Household Sciences Building at the corner of Queens Park and Bloor Street, where the office had spent the past 25 years.

"This the start of an exciting new era at the Ombudsman's Office. We are modernizing our operations and streamlining our approach to cases so as to best serve Ontario's citizens," explained Ombudsman André Marin.

The new ultra modern office space is designed to encourage innovative teamwork. All staff are together on one floor in an open concept modular-style office that will promote collaboration. The organization has been restructured to be more responsive to citizens' concerns and to effectively handle serious systemic issues.

The Office's operations have been streamlined with the creation of an Early Resolution team which intakes complaints, triages and attempts to resolve them, as well as the adoption of a number of internal mechanisms to improve the quality and timeliness of investigations. In addition, the Special Ombudsman Response Team (SORT) was created to deal with serious, sensitive, high profile, and systemic issues that require in-depth structured



The Chief Justice of Ontario, the Honourable R. Roy McMurtry (left), cuts the ribbon with Ombudsman André Marin, for the official opening of the new Ombudsman of Ontario office. In attendance were members of the Ombudsman's staff and Officers of the Legislature including Auditor General of Ontario Jim McCarter, Information and Privacy Commissioner Dr. Ann Cavoukian and Integrity Commissioner the Honourable Coulter Osbourne, Q.C., as well as Assistant Chief Election Officer Loren Wells. Visit the Ombudsman of Ontario website at: www.ombudsman.on.ca for the full text of the Chief Justice's opening remarks.

investigations. These cases usually result in a public report.

"With this move and a more efficient approach to caseload, we are positioned to vigorously defend the rights of Ontarians and assist citizens who feel they have been treated unfairly by a provincial

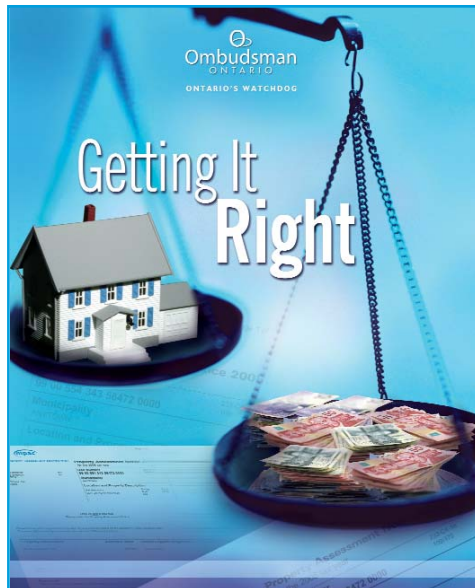
governmental organization," said Mr. Marin.

"The Ontario Ombudsman has to be accessible and relevant. Our goal is to provide effective and timely responses to complaints and remain the average citizen's corridor to the seat of power."

Property tax assessment report released

The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) is experiencing a crisis of credibility and must take real and concrete steps to improve public confidence in the assessment system, Ombudsman André Marin said at a press conference announcing the release of his report on the investigation into the transparency of the property assessment process and the integrity and efficiency of decision-making at MPAC.

"While I would like to acknowledge the willingness on the part of MPAC to cooperate with our investigation and the proactive steps it has committed to improving its process since this investigation began, the credibility of MPAC's evaluation



Over 3,700 complaints were received during the investigation making it the most complained-about issue in the 30-year history of the Ombudsman's office.

process simply cannot be restored without altering how it operates on a day-to-day basis and changing key aspects of its corporate culture," the Ombudsman said.

Following a five-month investigation, Mr. Marin presented 22 recommendations in his final report titled, "Getting it Right." The Ministry of Finance and MPAC pledged to implement 18 of the recommendations immediately and to consider implementation of the remaining four after further study. MPAC has agreed to report back to the Ombudsman within six months' time on its progress in implementing the report's recommendations.



ONTARIO'S WATCHDOG

New changes to the logo, motto and corporate colours were introduced along with the move to the new office. The new logo represents a play on the "O" for Ombudsman and the Province of Ontario and symbolises the interaction between the office of the Ombudsman and the government. It suggests the subtle but far-reaching impact of the Ombudsman's office, overseeing the administration of the Ontario government and protecting the rights of Ontarians.

The blue colour represents the fresh new approach to the revitalization and modernization of the Ombudsman's office.



A 19-member delegation of municipal government officials from Beijing visited the Ombudsman's Office in February. The Ombudsman, along with members of his executive team, provided a presentation on the mandate and role of the Ombudsman and the process used by our Office. Xu Yang (right), Chief Judge, Beijing High People's Court of China, Judicial Supervision Division is greeted by the Ombudsman while a member of the delegation looks on.

Case summaries

Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC)

Mr. W contacted our office requesting assistance with the assessment of his property by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC). Mr. W explained that he had purchased a property that had been recently severed from another property. He said that the assessment he received from the MPAC was very high, and appeared to be based on the original unsevered property. He advised that he had been trying for a year to have the MPAC complete the 2004 assessment of his newly created property, but had been unsuccessful.

An Ombudsman Representative contacted the MPAC and determined that there had been an oversight by MPAC in registering the severance. The Ombudsman Representative relayed information necessary to complete the registration and the MPAC committed to completing the assessment within the week.

Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)

Mr. J is an ODSP recipient who suffered a brain injury and has difficulty with memory retention. He contacted our office and explained that the Disability Adjudication Unit (DAU) had approved his medical eligibility for ODSP benefits in February 2004. However, three months later he had still not received any money. He added that his municipality had terminated his Ontario Works benefits because he was entitled to ODSP benefits. Mr. J explained that he was experiencing

great financial hardship. He was unable to pay his rent, was facing eviction and could not afford to purchase his medication. Mr. J stated that his ODSP worker had not returned his calls.

When we contacted the Ministry, it advised that it had notified Mr. J that his Ontario Works benefits had been terminated because he was receiving insurance money. It said it had requested that he provide more information so it could assess his financial eligibility for benefits but he had not done so. The Ministry also claimed that Mr. J had hung up when the Ministry tried to provide him with information. The Ministry explained that it had scheduled an interview with Mr. J but that he had not shown up and that his ODSP worker had been on holiday and could not return his calls.

The Ministry acknowledged that it was experiencing delays in processing all of its DAU approvals and the average processing time was four months. Mr. J countered that no one at the ODSP office ever informed him that there were documents missing from his file and someone had called him to cancel his appointment because the file was already complete. Mr. J resubmitted the information he said he had already provided to the Ministry and shortly after, the Ministry approved Mr. J's benefits and issued his first cheque and drug card.

Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP)

Ms S completed her 2003-2004 OSAP application online, with the desire to be considered for the Queen Elizabeth II Aiming for the Top Scholarship.

However, she was unable to access the appropriate screen option for the Scholarship application form because she responded incorrectly to one of the prompting questions that she found to be confusing. When we discussed this situation with the Ministry, it disagreed that the question was confusing, but agreed to reword the question for the future. We then asked whether the Ministry would be prepared to award Ms S the funds she would have received had she been able to access the Scholarship application form. After the Ministry reviewed Ms S' high school transcript, it agreed to provide her with \$3,500, which is the annual maximum allowable under the Scholarship, for her first year of university studies.

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

Watch for the release of the Ombudsman's 2005 - 2006 Annual Report in June 2006.

SORT

The Special Ombudsman Response Team or SORT was created to conduct specialized investigations on high profile issues which can impact a large number of people. SORT investigations are conducted after a thorough study of the issue and only after the Ombudsman is satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to warrant an investigation. SORT investigations are considered where there:

- is a serious and sensitive issue having a high public interest component;
- are broad systemic implications;
- the facts of the complaint are complex and/or not agreed upon; and
- there is no likelihood of an informal resolution to the complaint.

Findings and recommendations produced after a SORT investigation are often made public, once the Ombudsman's report has been submitted to the Legislature.

Information on recently completed and ongoing SORT investigations can be found on the SORT page of the Ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.on.ca. To submit a complaint for a potential SORT investigation: Call the SORT toll-free number, [1-866-623-SORT \(7678\)](tel:1-866-623-SORT) or complete the SORT Information Form on-line at www.ombudsman.on.ca.

Contact information

Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario
Bell Trinity Square
483 Bay Street,
10th Floor, South Tower
Toronto, Ontario M5G 2C9

Complaints Line – 1-800-263-1830
Business Line – 416-586-3300
TTY, hard of hearing and deaf
1-866-411-4211
Fax – 416-586-3485
Website: www.ombudsman.on.ca

*For mailing address changes, please call our
Communications Office at 416-586-3353.*

Communications Office
Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario
Bell Trinity Square
483 Bay Street
10th Floor, South Tower
Toronto, Ontario M5G 2C9

Who We Are

The Ombudsman investigates complaints about services provided by the Government of Ontario and its organizations. He also conducts systemic investigations on important issues about government services, which can affect large numbers of people. Under the *Ombudsman Act*, individuals as well as government officials and staff working in government organizations are required to cooperate with the Ombudsman and provide information during an investigation. Many cases brought to the Ombudsman are resolved informally through contact with government ministries and organizations.

You can make a complaint about an individual or systemic problem relating to Ontario Government services free of charge. Complaints can be made in writing, by email, online through our website, by fax or phone. An Ombudsman staff member will respond to your complaint. All complaints made to the Ombudsman are confidential.

