



THE Watchdog

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OMBUDSMAN CALLS FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT: ANNUAL REPORT 2010-2011

In his Annual Report, released on June 21, Ontario Ombudsman André Marin is calling on the government of Ontario to embrace the worldwide trend toward open government, noting that many of his investigations of government organizations revealed a lack of transparency and accountability to Ontarians.

"Ontario has an opportunity to be a leader here," Mr. Marin says in the first [annual report](#) of his second five-year term as Ombudsman. "When government decision-making remains closed, those it serves are left frustrated and anxious."

The rise of social media and unprecedented public access to real-time information has had repercussions around the globe – raising public expectations of transparency in government, says Mr. Marin. "The days when governments could control the message and choose how to manage public information are gone," he says, urging the government to think pro-actively about releasing information instead of simply reacting to requests.

The Ombudsman cited several examples of how his work revealed government decisions that were less than transparent – the best known being the expansion of police powers for last summer's G20 summit in Toronto. As his December 2010 report, Caught in the Act, documented, the province quietly passed a new regulation under wartime legislation and failed to warn the public about it, contributing to massive violations of civil rights. The province has since pledged to scrap the Public Works Protection Act and better inform the public in future.

Another such case was detailed in Mr. Marin's August 2010 report The LHM Spin, after he found Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) had, contrary to their public-engagement mandate, illegally allowed closed meetings for "education" purposes. All LHINs have since changed their bylaws and adopted new guidelines for community engagement.

Other areas of the Ombudsman's report that touch on the "open government" theme include:

- ▶ Long-term care home inspections (page 39): While the province was posting inspection results online as promised, the information was often grossly outdated, inaccurate and incomprehensible.
- ▶ MUSH sector oversight (page 12): Unlike any other province, Ontario shields Municipalities, Universities, School boards and Hospitals (as well as long-term care homes, children's aid societies and police) from Ombudsman scrutiny, meaning Mr. Marin's office had to turn away 1,963 complaints about these organizations this year.

The report also includes summaries of many of the thousands of individual cases resolved by the Ombudsman and staff, as well as examples of serious issues that his office flagged and dealt with proactively in meetings with senior officials from the most complained about organizations.

As in previous years, the exposure of lack of transparency in such cases has ultimately led to better governance, Mr. Marin says, citing examples such as his 2006 probe of the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation's secretive methods, his 2007 investigation of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation's initial disinterest in insider wins, and his 2009 revelation of the arbitrary funding cap on the cancer drug Avastin.

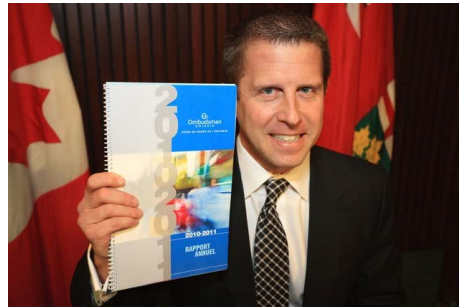
Visit www.ombudsman.on.ca to download a copy of the 2010-2011 Annual Report, [watch a video](#) of the press conference, or see some of the highlights [from the past year](#).

INVESTIGATION UPDATES

For updates on our Office's ongoing and completed investigations, such as the Herceptin probe and the investigation into non-emergency medical transportation services, you can visit our newly-redesigned [website](#).

OUTREACH EVENTS

The Ombudsman followed the release of the Annual Report with an appearance at **Third Tuesday Toronto**, a local social media gathering that drew more than 120 people. He spoke about open government, as well as touched on the Office's use of social media in investigations.



The Ombudsman's Office oversees and investigates close to 500 provincial ministries, agencies, tribunals, and Crown corporations.

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Email: info@ombudsman.on.ca

Write: Ombudsman Ontario, Bell Trinity Square, 483 Bay St., 10th Floor, South Tower, Toronto, ON M5G 2C9.



NEW WEBSITE

We've been renovating! Our website has a brand new look. We've made it easier for you to [search our site](#), [learn more about our office](#), and [file complaints online](#). Visit us at www.ombudsman.on.ca and see for yourself.

TRAINING

Our fifth annual training course in conducting systemic investigations - **Sharpening Your Teeth: Investigative Training for Administrative Watchdogs** – will be held in Toronto, November 28-30, 2011. For information on course content and registration, send an email to training@ombudsman.on.ca or contact Sue Mason at 416-586-3453.

CONNECTING ONLINE

The Ombudsman now has more than **4,700** Twitter followers and more than **1,500** Facebook fans. Thanks for your comments, conversation, and feedback!
We'd also love to hear what you



thornley Joseph Thornley

A great presentation by @Ont_Ombudsman at #3tyyz. Makes me feel more confident in my government.

13 hours ago

Mr. Marin joined 200 attendees from the **Ontario College of Teachers** on June 2 to discuss accountability in the public sphere. He used examples such as the expansion of police powers during the G20 summit in Toronto (*Caught in the Act*) and his probe of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation. The video will be posted on [their site](#) the week of June 27.

On June 8, the communications team presented at the 2011 **GovCamp** conference as part of Net Change Week. Participants from all levels of government, as well as the private sector, were on hand to offer suggestions about how the Office could promote open government and further engage the public. You can [watch the video here](#).



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