



THE WATCHDOG

Newsletter

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Brighter days ahead for municipal accountability: Ombudsman

After seven years of “patchwork” enforcement and widespread confusion about the rules requiring them to hold open meetings, there is good news for Ontario municipalities and the citizens seeking to hold them accountable, Ontario Ombudsman André Marin said in his latest report.

Many municipalities have grown to embrace the spirit of the “Sunshine Law” – the open meeting requirements of the *Municipal Act, 2001* – Mr. Marin notes in his [third annual report](#) devoted to the work of his office’s Open Meeting Law Enforcement Team (OMLET), which has investigated complaints about illegal closed meetings since 2008.



“As citizens and municipal officials become more educated about the open meeting law,” Mr. Marin writes, “more municipalities seem to be getting the

JANUARY 2015

The Ombudsman investigates public complaints about Ontario government agencies. His office oversees more than 500 provincial ministries, agencies, tribunals, boards, commissions and Crown corporations.

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OMLET IN THE NEWS

- [Ont. ombudsman says municipal councils should face penalties for meeting in secret](#) (Canadian Press)
- [Ontario ombudsman sees jump in complaints over municipal](#)

rules right and attracting fewer complaints. At the same time, complainants seem to have a better sense of when their council is violating the law, and their complaints are more likely to be justified."

The report covers 149 cases received by OMLET between September 1, 2013 and August 31, 2014. During that period, the Ombudsman and OMLET reviewed 49 meetings by 40 municipalities and two local boards, and found 11 of them illegal.

- › [Read the 2013-2014 OMLET Annual Report](#)
- › [Watch the press conference](#)
- › [Press Release](#)
- › [Facts and highlights \(PDF\)](#)
- › [Ombudsman's remarks \(PDF\)](#)

"A REALLY IMPORTANT PARTNERSHIP": Head of the OPS speaks to watchdogs

Steve Orsini, Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Ontario Public Service, led an animated discussion about how government organizations can work pro-actively with oversight offices on January 20, 2015, during an investigative training course for oversight agencies. He noted, "We should not fear being questioned. As soon as we do that, we're going to undermine our long-term success."

- › [Watch the video](#)



Steve Orsini delivers his keynote speech during the Ontario Ombudsman's Sharpening Your Teeth training on January 20, 2015.

INVESTIGATIONS UPDATE

- › [Hydro One billing practices](#): This investigation is ongoing, with

[matters \(Toronto Star\)](#)

- › [Watchdog's last snap at old London council \(London Free Press\)](#)
- › [Municipalities illegally excluded public from meetings: Ombud \(Toronto Sun\)](#)

UNIVERSITY OVERSIGHT

On January 16, Deputy Ombudsman Barbara Finlay spoke to student leaders from the Ontario chapter of the Canadian Federation of Students about the Ombudsman's [new jurisdiction](#) over universities, which will come into effect in the coming months. The new oversight, part of the Public Sector and MPP Accountability and Transparency Act, also includes the ability to investigate complaints about municipalities and school boards.

[Watch the video](#)



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almost 9,700 complaints received so far.

- › [Ontario direction to police on de-escalation](#): The preliminary report is nearing completion.
- › [Adults with developmental disabilities in crisis](#): As the investigation wraps up and the Ombudsman's report is being drafted, we continue to resolve individual cases and take complaints - more than 1,200 to date.

Anyone who has information relevant to our ongoing investigations can contact our office at 1-800-263-1830, file an online complaint or email: info@ombudsman.on.ca.

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