



THE WATCHDOG

Newsletter

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FRANÇAIS

Ombudsman receives 205 school board complaints since Sept. 1

Issues include special needs services, busing, discipline

Since new legislation allowing the Ombudsman to take public complaints about school boards took effect on September 1, the office has received 205 complaints. The issues range from bullying and daycare, to conflicts with principals, to special needs students, to labour issues. Almost all have been resolved through referrals and by working with school boards, and without formal investigation.



In one example, the mother of a kindergartner with special needs contacted the Office with concerns about busing services. She said her son's bus was consistently late and that on one occasion, the bus driver attempted to drop him off at the wrong address. Although she had complained to the bus driver and her son's principal, she didn't know who to talk to at the school board. We provided her with contact information for student transportation services, and she received a written response from both the school

board and the bus company, which significantly improved its services.

Ombudsman staff also attended the People for Education and the Council for Exceptional Children annual conferences, sharing the news

NOVEMBER 2015

The Ombudsman investigates public complaints about Ontario government agencies and broader public sector organizations. The office oversees more than 500 provincial ministries, agencies, tribunals, boards, commissions and Crown corporations, as well as school boards and, starting January 2016, municipalities and universities.

[FILE A COMPLAINT ONLINE](#)

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HYDRO ONE

The Ombudsman's Office has completed its work on more than 10,000 complaints about billing and

that our Office can take school board complaints and answering questions about our expanded oversight. Common concerns at both events included special education supports, French immersion and discipline, as well as general questions about our process of resolving complaints. In addition, Ombudsman staff spoke to the English Catholic Council Directors of Education and the Association des conseils scolaires des écoles publiques de l'Ontario.



[Check out our brochure](#) to learn more about how we deal with school board complaints, or [fill out a complaint form here](#).

We want to connect with school boards, universities and municipalities!

Contact us at thewatchdog@ombudsman.on.ca for brochures or to check our availability to speak to your organization.

COMING TO A MUNICIPALITY (AND UNIVERSITY) NEAR YOU



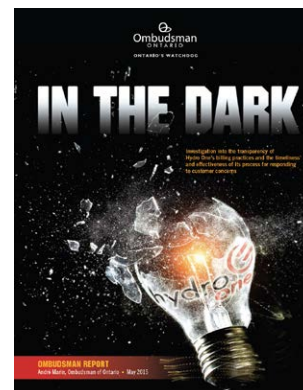
Effective January 1, the Ombudsman will begin taking complaints about Ontario's 444 municipalities and 21 publicly-funded universities. In an ongoing effort to share information about the new jurisdiction, our Office is reaching out to all municipalities and universities with a survey on their internal complaint and

accountability mechanisms. The Ombudsman has always and will continue to function as an office of last resort, and encourages creating or bolstering strong local complaint mechanisms.

Ombudsman staff passed out dozens of brochures and spoke with municipal representatives at the Ontario West Municipal Conference on November 20. Senior Counsel Laura Pettigrew spoke to more than 350 attendees at a plenary session, highlighting the Ombudsman's process for taking and triaging complaints, and what to expect when oversight comes into effect on January 1.

On November 12, the Acting Ombudsman hosted an information session for representatives from Ontario universities who play an important role in complaint resolution at the university level. The session was engaging, with universities offering practical, candid advice on how best to address complaints about their institutions. Barry McCartan, Lead Director,

customer service issues at Hydro One ([read our May 2015 report on that investigation here](#)), in time for the December 4 deadline imposed by Bill 91. That legislation, which affirmed the partial privatization of Hydro One, stipulated that the Ombudsman could not take new complaints about the utility as of June 4, 2015, but allowed six months for pending cases to be resolved; in that time, the Ombudsman dealt with more than 550 individual complaints. It also permanently removed the Ombudsman's independent oversight of Hydro One, as well as that of the other officers of the legislature. We continue to refer new complaints to the utility, which [recently created its own internal ombudsman](#).



COME WORK WITH US!

In the next few months, we'll be growing our team as we expand to oversee municipalities, universities and school boards. The Office received additional funding to hire Early Resolutions Officers, Investigators, Legal Counsel, Communications, and other staff.

Hiring NOW:

[Information Officer](#)

[Communications Officer](#)

We're always accepting resumes. [Read about the types of positions we offer and send us your application!](#)

Postsecondary Financial Information System Project at the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, noted, "We encourage all involved to be open to change as we go forward. Each university, and now the Ombudsman, have a common commitment and responsibility to fairness for students, staff and faculty." Ombudsman staff also attended an in-house training session with representatives from the Council of Ontario Universities, the University of Toronto, and Wilfrid Laurier University.

MUNICIPAL MEETINGS ANNUAL REPORT TO BE RELEASED ON DECEMBER 16

The Annual Report of our Open Meeting Law Enforcement Team (OMLET), which recaps a year of Ombudsman investigations of closed municipal meetings, will be released on Wednesday, December 16 at 1 p.m. and webcast live at www.ombudsman.on.ca. The report will cover the period between from September 1, 2014 to August 31, 2015, as well as provide a synopsis of any complaints received or investigations completed since then.

In the News - Closed Meeting Investigations

- › [Ombudsman report shows seed of amalgamation between Burk's Falls, Armour](#) (North Bay Nipissing)
- › [Port Colborne pleased with closed meeting report](#) (Erie Media)
- › [Meaford Moves From LAS to Ombudsman For Closed Meeting Investigations](#) (The Meaford Independent)
- › [Hamilton Township asked to post video of Council meetings online](#) (Northumberland Today)
- › [Closed meeting didn't violate rules: Ombudsman](#) (Niagara Falls Review)
- › [Ombudsman's Office raps Town of Essex for holding illegal closed door meeting](#) (Windsor Star)
- › [Ombudsman to oversee Municipality of Kincardine closed meeting investigations](#) (Kincardine News)

Municipalities have also been preparing for the Ombudsman's oversight on January 1 by ensuring complaint mechanisms are in place. Our Office recommends strengthening or creating a local complaint office because issues are best resolved at the local level.

In the News - Local complaint mechanisms

- › [Wasaga Beach to hire integrity commissioner](#) (Wasaga Sun)
- › [No More Integrity Commissioner](#) (The Beach)
- › [Amherstburg hires integrity commissioner](#) (Windsor Star)
- › [County to explore idea of shared auditor general with city](#) (Windsor Star)
- › [City of Sarnia welcomes its first integrity commissioner in its 101-year history](#) (Sarnia Observer)



INVESTIGATIONS UPDATE

Ontario direction to police on de-escalation:

Ombudsman staff are in the process of finalizing this report.

Adults with developmental disabilities in crisis:

Staff continue to resolve individual cases and take complaints - more than 1,300 to date. The large-scale systemic investigation has been completed and we are in the process of drafting the report.

STAY CONNECTED

Ombudsman Ontario has **3,952 Facebook fans** and **34,919 Twitter followers!** Please continue to reach out to us on social media, or drop us a line at thewatchdog@ombudsman.on.ca.

And stay connected with our office in both official languages! Follow our French Twitter account: [@Ont_OmbudsmanFR](https://twitter.com/Ont_OmbudsmanFR).

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