



THE WATCHDOG

Newsletter

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New year brings new accountability to Ontario

Ombudsman starts taking complaints about municipalities and universities January 1



A new era of accountability begins on January 1, 2016, when the Office of the Ontario Ombudsman takes on full oversight of municipalities and universities - a first in the Office's 40-year history. In municipalities, the Ombudsman will be able to look at everything from municipal services, like snow removal, to housing programs, to councillor conduct; in universities, the Office may be able to assist with student services, financial aid, or academic appeals, among countless other issues.

The December issue of Municipal World magazine included an op-ed by Acting Ombudsman Barbara Finlay, which explained how our office operates and what municipalities can expect come January 1. [Read it here.](#)

Have a complaint about a municipality? [Read this first](#)

Have a complaint about a university? [Read this first](#)

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



DECEMBER 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. [Barbara Finlay](#) is the Acting Ombudsman.

[FILE A COMPLAINT ONLINE](#)

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UPDATE: Recent school board cases



Since September 1, the Ombudsman's Office has also been able to take complaints about school boards. Since then, we've received XX complaints about issues like busing and transportation issues, special education, and student discipline. We resolve the vast majority of them quickly through informal inquiries and shuttle diplomacy.

In one example, a primary school student with special needs was put on a waiting list for placement in a support program for children with autism. The boy's mother was told that a spot was unlikely to become available soon. Concerned that her child's needs were not being met, she escalated

her concerns with the school board and then called our Office. When Ombudsman staff contacted the school board, we were advised that a space had opened up in one of the programs, which was then offered to the boy. The mother agreed the new program would be an ideal fit and thanked our office for helping resolve the issue.

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

In the News

- ▶ [Watchdog gets new power: Ombudsman's office to increase oversight of province's city councils](#) (Canadian Press)
- ▶ [Ombudsman's office will be able to investigate municipal council complaints starting January 1st](#) (Durham Radio News)
- ▶ [Ombudsman eyes municipal crackdown: Watchdog will now address complaints against cities](#) (Toronto Star)
- ▶ [Regional ombudsman one step closer](#) (The Oshawa Express)
- ▶ [Region to comply with ombudsman recommendations](#) (Niagara Falls Review)

Ombudsman reports progress in municipal transparency, encourages local accountability officers: OMLET Annual Report

On December 16, Acting Ombudsman Barbara Finlay released the fourth annual report for the Ombudsman's investigations into closed municipal meetings. She also

The Ombudsman's Top 10 Things to Know for 2016

A year-end Top 10 list is an annual tradition here at the Office of the Ontario Ombudsman. As we wrap up our milestone 40th year and welcome an historic expansion of our mandate on January 1, Acting Ombudsman Barbara Finlay has designed this list to help Ontarians get to know us better. Without further ado, here are her [Top 10 Things To Know for 2016](#).

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.

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



UPCOMING OUTREACH

Ombudsman staff will be at the Community Service Fair at Dufferin Mall in Toronto on Saturday, January 23, from 12 p.m. - 2 p.m. If you're in the area, drop by to learn

took the opportunity to provide an overview of how the Office will deal with the influx of general municipal complaints when jurisdiction of municipalities takes effect on January 1, 2016.



"We have been encouraged by the response of local councils to our recent findings and recommendations," Ms. Finlay said. "I'm optimistic that this constructive spirit will continue as we start reviewing broader municipal complaints for the first time in the new year."



The Ombudsman's Open Meeting Law Enforcement Team (OMLET) has handled some 800 complaints about closed meetings since it was created in 2008, with this past year being particularly active. Between September 1, 2014 and August 31, 2015, it reviewed 85 meetings held by 61 municipalities. The Ombudsman deemed 16 meetings "illegal" – that is, they did not meet the open meeting requirements of the *Municipal Act* – and found 40 procedural violations. And in another 15 reports issued since August, OMLET reviewed 30 meetings in 13 additional municipalities, with the Ombudsman finding seven illegal meetings and 23 procedural violations.

- › [Read the OMLET Annual Report](#)
- › [Read the full press release](#)
- › [Read the Acting Ombudsman's remarks](#)
- › [Read the facts and highlights](#)

Ms. Finlay noted that the municipalities the Office has dealt with since 2008 have shown remarkable progress in embracing openness and transparency. As she says in the report: "We have learned a great deal along the way, and worked productively and co-operatively with municipal officials across the province who appreciate that our common goal is to serve the public interest."

more about the work of our office.

Ombudsman staff will also be available to answer questions at information fairs at both the [Ontario University Registrars' Association](#) annual conference on February 11, and at the Ontario Good Roads Association and Rural Ontario Municipal Association's [Combined Conference](#) from February 21-24, 2016.

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 **3,982 Facebook fans** and **35,264 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

Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario | Bureau de l'Ombudsman de l'Ontario

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