



THE WATCHDOG

Newsletter

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You asked us ...

Information and toolkits for municipal and school board stakeholders

The Ombudsman's Office has investigated and resolved hundreds of thousands of complaints about provincial government bodies over the past 40 years, but the recent expansion of our mandate to municipalities, universities and school boards has brought us into contact with hundreds of new stakeholders.

As complaint numbers continue to grow, so do the number of engagements on our outreach calendar. To dispel myths, better understand the public's concerns, and clarify how our Office can offer real help, our staff have been busy sharing information with the public, educating and learning from municipal, university and school board stakeholders.

**MARCH 2016**

The Ombudsman investigates public complaints about Ontario government agencies and broader public sector organizations. The office oversees more than 1,000 provincial ministries, agencies, tribunals, boards, commissions and Crown corporations, as well as school boards, municipalities and universities. Barbara Finlay is the Acting Ombudsman until April 1, 2016, when new Ombudsman Paul Dubé takes office.

[FILE A COMPLAINT ONLINE](#)

Ombudsman Ontario

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VIEW FROM THE TOP - OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE

On March 31, in response to many requests from municipalities and school boards, we are hosting two live webinars. Our senior team will discuss in detail how we work, our process for triaging and resolving complaints, and what to expect when the Ombudsman's Office calls. The webinar on municipal complaints will be from 9 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. EST, followed by the webinar on school board complaints from 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. EST. [Contact us if you'd like to participate](#) - there's still time! And if you can't watch live, the webinar will be available anytime on our website; watch for those details in a future newsletter.

Next month, our team will make presentations at various municipal workshops and zone meetings organized by the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario, in [Kemptville, Englehart, Sault Ste. Marie, Strathroy, Parry Sound, Cobourg, and Cambridge](#).

Also in April, our school board outreach team will be on hand at information booths in Brantford and Toronto for school-related events organized by the Ontario Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health, the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition, and the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations.

Our website also includes several tools for anyone interested in how we handle complaints in the various sectors we oversee:

If you have a **complaint about an Ontario government service**, [read this](#).

If you have a **complaint about a municipality**, [read this](#).

If you have a **complaint about a university**, [read this](#).

If you have a **complaint about a school board**, [read this](#).

Our office partnered with Canada's Public Policy Forum to convene a series of roundtables with stakeholders last fall, and a conference in February that highlighted the role of ombudsman offices in improving accountability and general quality in public services across the country.

Keynote speaker at the February 25 event was the head of the Ontario Public Service and Secretary of the Cabinet, Steve Orsini.

Mr. Orsini's presentation discussed the importance of the Ombudsman's work in ensuring transparent and accountable government.

[Watch the video here](#)

We have a job for you

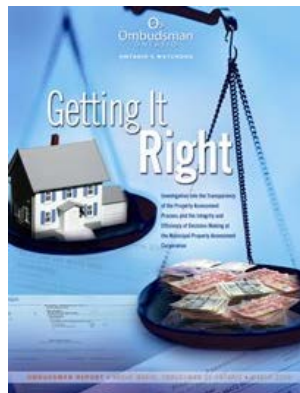


We're always looking for talented people to join our communications, early resolutions, and legal teams. We currently have openings in all three departments. Are you a law student looking for somewhere to spread your legal eagle wings? If you said yes, click [here](#) for more information about how to join our team. Do you have experience handling complaints? Do you enjoy analyzing and identifying issues? A job in early resolutions may be the right fit for you. Learn more [here](#). Are you a

strong communicator who's social-media savvy in both official languages? You may be just what our team needs. Click [here](#) for more information.

10 years later: Lasting impact with MPAC

It's been a decade since the Ombudsman's March 2006 report, [Getting it Right](#), recommended an overhaul of how the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation handled property tax assessments across the province. The government froze all assessments for two years so the Ombudsman's chief recommendation - the reversal of an unfair onus on property owners to prove MPAC's assessments were inaccurate - could be implemented. Since then, MPAC has greatly improved the transparency of its processes and the number of complaints about the corporation to our Office has dropped significantly. MPAC provides an online portal where people can research and compare their assessments, and has been "proactive and responsive with our Office" when our staff raise complaint issues, says our Director of Investigations, Sue Haslam. "This illustrates the kind of positive change and lasting effects that an Ombudsman investigation can bring to public services."



MR. DUBÉ'S DEBUT

Mr. J. Paul Dubé, who will become Ontario's seventh Ombudsman on April 1, met with our staff earlier this month. In an impromptu speech, the former federal Taxpayers' Ombudsman said he will focus on fairness and "building relationships," especially in our new areas of jurisdiction. Watch for our news release on his appointment this Friday.



IN THE NEWS

[Illegal Vaughan daycare operator charged with manslaughter in toddler Eva Ravikovich's death](#) (The Toronto Star)
[City of Greater Sudbury facing complaint](#) (The Sudbury Star)
[Bill 8 Takes Effect](#) (Municipal Monitor - page 8)

Broader public sector: Recent cases

Complaints within the Ombudsman's new jurisdiction of municipalities, universities and school boards are well over 1,000. The bulk of these cases have been resolved informally, usually through referral to local officials; no formal investigations have been launched to date.

Since January 1, our Office has received **920** complaints about **municipalities**, regarding everything from municipal services, to council conduct, to snow clearing. In one case, a homeless teenager who could not live with either parent was denied assistance through Ontario Works and was not provided with anything in writing about how to appeal the decision. After Ombudsman staff made inquiries with a supervisor at Ontario Works, the teen's mother confirmed that he was homeless and a cheque was prepared for rent and living costs so the teen could attend school. The teen thanked us for our assistance, and the supervisor apologized for the error made by the intake worker, and thanked our Office for our intervention, saying he was happy to have the Ombudsman's oversight.

We've had **389 school board** complaints since September 1. Our staff have pointed people in the right direction and helped them resolve complicated problems. In one example, a woman contacted our Office when she discovered the school board would only bus her granddaughter to a school that was more than twice as far away as the next closest option. Due to low population density and a large coverage area, there was only one bus with a route near their home. Our Office made inquiries and discovered it would cost the board approximately \$35,000 per year to bus the woman's granddaughter to the closest school. The woman now receives funding to help offset the cost of driving her granddaughter to and from school.

Our **university** complaints are also on the rise, with **89** complaints in the first two months. Ombudsman staff continue to track complaint trends and resolve individual issues.

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

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



[Little Katelynn's death inspires new powers for child advocate](#) (The Toronto Star)

ONGOING INVESTIGATIONS

[Ontario direction to police on de-escalation:](#)

The investigation is completed and the preliminary report is in the process of being finalized and updated.

[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 **4,230 Facebook fans** and **36,271 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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