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Ombudsman ONTARIO

THE WATCHDOG

Newsletter

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Strengthening municipal accountability

New Ombudsman addresses municipal integrity commissioners

Noting that “we are colleagues, if not partners, in the same business,” Ontario Ombudsman Paul Dubé assured municipal integrity commissioners from across the province that his office is there to bolster their role, and act as an “agent of positive change.”

“My office continues to encourage municipalities to appoint their own accountability officers,” Mr. Dubé told the spring meeting of the Municipal Integrity Commissioners of Ontario in Vaughan on April 26. “We are there as a last resort, to ensure local mechanisms are working well, and to recommend ways they can be improved.

APRIL 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. New Ombudsman Paul Dubé took office April 1.

FILE A COMPLAINT ONLINE

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VIDEO:
What to expect when the Ombudsman calls

The Ombudsman's office has received more than 1,100 complaints about 240 different municipalities since January 1, and councils themselves are the No. 1 topic of those complaints, Mr. Dubé said. Most have already been resolved.

In dealing with complaints about integrity commissioners (seven to date), Mr. Dubé said our office has generally found their actions reasonable – but in some cases has suggested ways to improve the process for all concerned.

"While each case and each municipality is different, we encourage them to establish integrity commissioners, codes of conduct and clear complaint processes," he said. "We have yet to conduct a formal investigation, but when we do, I will not hesitate to recommend municipalities take these steps as a way of improving local accountability."

Also in attendance at the MICO meeting were Mr. Dubé's fellow officers of the Legislature, Information and Privacy Commissioner Brian Beamish and provincial Integrity Commissioner David Wake.

Vaughan Mayor Maurizio Bevilacqua welcomed the group, urging them to "remain vigilant" in their oversight. "Let's keep this world as honest as possible," he said.

A fair assessment

Ombudsman Paul Dubé and staff meeting with MPAC president and CAO Antoni Wisinowski and colleagues.

As the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation rolls out its latest assessment notices across the province, its senior managers met April 21 with Ombudsman staff to share the information they provide to property owners. The agency's newly designed materials help homeowners see how the value of their property was assessed.

Our office has monitored issues with MPAC since the publication of our 2006 report, Getting it Right - an investigation prompted by more than 3,700 complaints about the agency. As a result of that investigation, the government froze

Videos of our webinars for municipalities and school boards are now online here.

Municipal video

School Board video

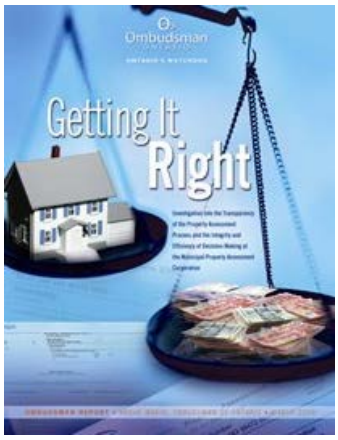
REACHING OUT

Society of Ontario Adjudicator and Regulators - April 5
Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario - April 6, 14, 19, 20, 26, 29
Ontario Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health - April 7
Ottawa Carleton District School Board - April 12
Ontario Public Supervisory Officers' Association - April 13
Ontario Healthy School Coalition - April 14
Ontario Municipal Human Resources Association - April 15
Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations - April 16, 17
Ottawa Carleton Assembly of School Councils - April 21
Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association - April 27-29

Contact thewatchdog@ombudsman.on.ca if you have an event we might be interested in attending.

IN THE NEWS

assessments for two years to allow MPAC to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations.



Raising a Flag for Autism

Ombudsman Paul Dubé addressed the group gathered for the autism flag raising ceremony at City Hall in Toronto on April 4 in recognition of World Autism Awareness Day. Mr. Dubé recalled how heartening it was to visit the Brighton Launch, a program for young adults with learning challenges. In a visit to the program shortly before becoming Ombudsman, he saw first-hand one of the many community supports for people with exceptional needs in our province.

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 **1,212** complaints about **municipalities,** regarding everything from municipal services, to council conduct, to snow clearing. In one case, a town clerk contacted our office after the local council, which was considering establishing a code of

'This is a job I've dreamt of': Ontario's ombudsman talks Twitter, transparency and his new role (The National Post)
Meet Ontario's new Ombudsman (The Toronto Sun)
Ontario's new ombudsman on his job qualifications (CP24)
G20 class-action lawsuits to proceed, G7 coming to Canada in 2018 (The Council of Canadians)
Most complaints at Ottawa jail focus on health care, ombudsman says (The Ottawa Citizen)
School board trustees support adopting a code of conduct for themselves (The Ottawa Citizen)
Ontario's police Watchdog lags behing other in transparency (The Toronto Star)
Premier Kathleen Wynne says Andrew Loku SIU report will be made public (The Toronto Star)

HELP WANTED

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. 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? Click here for more information.

CLOSED MEETINGS

conduct, expressed the view that it did not need to appoint an Integrity Commissioner, because any complaints related to the code of conduct could be forwarded to the Ombudsman for review. We explained that our Office does not replace the role of Integrity Commissioner - rather, we encourage municipalities to have their own accountability officers and complaint processes. We provided the clerk with information about the Ombudsman's role to share with council.

We've had **444 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 parent complained to our office after the school board looked into her conflict-of-interest complaint about two trustees who participated in decisions to close a local high school. The board's director of education had found there was no conflict. In our review of how the board handled the matter, we found that its process was designed for dealing with conflict complaints from trustees, not from the public. We are following up with the board to stress the need for a clear process in dealing with public complaints.

Our **university** complaints are also on the rise, with **104** complaints in the first two months. Ombudsman staff continue to track complaint trends and resolve individual issues. In a recent complaint, a would-be Bachelor of Education student complained that he was denied admission because he included a one-on-one teaching experience in his application - he said the university did not make it clear that he should not do so. We referred him to the university's dispute resolution service. Our staff explained that our Office is a last resort, but that we could review the university's response if he was not satisfied with the internal complaint process.

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

The Ombudsman's investigation found that council for the Township of Russell contravened the *Municipal Act* when it discussed councillor remuneration in closed session. Read the report

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 **4,285** Facebook fans and **36,477** 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.

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