

Read about improvements to municipal accountability, back to school time and more in the Ombudsman's August newsletter.

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OMBUDSMAN ENCOURAGED BY IMPROVED MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTABILITY



Ombudsman Paul Dubé and staff members at our booth at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario's annual conference in Ottawa, Aug. 20.

Ontario is less than two months away from local elections on Oct. 22 – which will undoubtedly see hundreds of new municipal council members and school trustees take office – and just months away from when changes to the *Municipal Act, 2001* are slated to take effect.

Many municipalities are also getting ready to appoint local integrity commissioners and draft codes of conduct before March 1, 2019, to meet the Act's new requirements. "Municipalities face unique concerns when it comes to transparency and accountability," said Ombudsman Paul Dubé at the [Association of Municipalities of Ontario \(AMO\) annual conference](#) in Ottawa earlier this month, where he met with various municipal stakeholders. "It's very encouraging to see more codes of conduct, integrity commissioners and ombudsmen being implemented at the local level."

With oversight of the province's 400-plus municipalities, the Ombudsman strives to be a valuable resource to local policymakers by offering tailored resources, best practices, and sensible recommendations to enhance transparency and improve governance.

At the AMO conference, the Ombudsman and staff heard from councillors, municipal staff, and other local stakeholders about the kinds of issues facing small, large, rural and urban municipalities – everything from the cost of retaining an integrity commissioner to making sure council meetings run according to procedural rules. As always, we came prepared to share our resources and materials, including our popular [tip card series](#) (several councillors and clerks told us they keep a set in their drawer, briefcase or binder) and new printed editions of our recent municipal investigation reports, [Press Pause](#), [By-Law Surprise](#) and [Counter Encounter](#).



Ombudsman staff share resources for municipalities at our AMO conference booth.

Councillors and municipal staff will soon have a new Ombudsman resource at their fingertips, as development of a searchable database of our open meeting reports nears completion. When ready, the online digest will enable users to quickly and easily find examples of how to apply the *Municipal Act*'s different closed meeting exceptions. In the meantime, all of our reports on open meeting investigations can be found on our website's [reports page](#) – simply filter by year and select the topic “Municipal Meetings.”

“We continue to see improvements in transparency and accountability at the local level,” Dubé said. “Our staff regularly answer questions about the rules from municipal clerks and councillors, and we will continue to do so in this next phase of change.”

BACK TO SCHOOL



Summer is coming to an end and the school year is almost here! It's an exciting time for thousands of students across Ontario. Here at Ombudsman Ontario, we're keeping school boards and universities top of mind as we continue to resolve student and parent issues and concerns.

STUDY UP: A REFRESHER ON OMBUDSMAN OVERSIGHT

The Ombudsman's jurisdiction was expanded to include school boards in September 2015 and universities in January 2016. Since then, we've received nearly 2,600 complaints about school boards and almost 700 about universities. (We also take complaints about colleges of applied arts and technology, which have always been within our mandate.)

In 2017-2018, most of our school board complaints were about the actions of school board staff or the level of available services that boards provided to students with special needs – but we've addressed all types of issues related to school boards and student services. In one case, a father tried to pick up his children from an after-school program but couldn't find them on the premises. [Read more about that case here.](#)

For universities, the most common complaints we received last year were about academic appeals – for example, we stepped in when one student's stalled academic appeal was going to result in him being withdrawn from his program. [See how we helped, here.](#)

TEAM EFFORT: WORKING TOGETHER TO RESOLVE ISSUES

When we receive a complaint about a university or school board, our goal is to resolve the issue as quickly and informally as possible. Normally, that means connecting the right people with each other and working to find a straightforward and practical resolution. Very rarely will we launch a formal investigation! Once an issue is resolved, it can often validate processes that a university or school board has already put in place.

Our Office has resolved thousands of cases and conducted one school board

investigation, which examined [school bus disruptions and issues in Toronto during the 2016-2017 school year](#).

WATCH AND LEARN: SCHOOL BOARDS

Ombudsman Dubé addressed the Ontario Public School Board Association to explain how he works with boards to resolve issues collaboratively. [Watch more](#).



WATCH AND LEARN: UNIVERSITIES



General Counsel Wendy Ray and Laura Pettigrew spoke to the Ontario University Registrars' Association's annual conference about how the Ombudsman's Office handles the oversight of universities and what you can expect when the Ombudsman calls. [Watch more](#).



**OMBUDSMAN'S
SUMMER MESSAGE**

**MESSAGE D'ÉTÉ DE
L'OMBUDSMAN**

In his summer message, the Ombudsman looks back at several busy and eventful months, from the release of his 2017-2018 annual report to a municipal investigation that found a regional council had infringed a journalist's rights. He also recognizes the impact of mental health issues on people in Ontario and around the world.

"There is one common issue I see running through all aspects of our jurisdiction, and that is the prevalence of issues related to mental health," the Ombudsman writes. "For instance, our office regularly hears from families struggling to access mental health supports for loved ones."

[Read the entire message here](#)

[File a complaint online or contact us here](#)

The Ombudsman is an independent officer of the Ontario legislature who conducts oversight of provincial government agencies and municipalities, universities and school boards. Ombudsman Paul Dubé began his five-year term on April 1, 2016.

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