

Ontario Ombudsman Paul Dubé's year-end message and our annual Top 10 list of key developments in the past year.

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NEW MANDATE, NEW CHALLENGES: Ombudsman reflects on 2018 and year ahead

In his year-end message, reviewing his office's work in 2018, Ontario Ombudsman Paul Dubé notes that historic changes will make the next year even more remarkable.

"There is no doubt that 2019 is shaping up to be one of the busiest and most challenging years in our office's history," the Ombudsman says, adding that the changes introduced in the provincial government's fall economic statement will bring Ombudsman oversight to two new areas: French language services and children's aid societies.

"We are committed to devoting the office's 43 years of experience to these areas," he says. "What's more, the addition of staff from the offices of the Child Advocate and French Language Services Commissioner, who bring extensive knowledge and expertise in these fields, will become an integral part of our office, enhancing the vitality of our organization and injecting new talent and energy into our work."

"As I reflect on the past year and the new year to come, I know there are significant challenges ahead, but also even greater opportunities to enhance public sector governance, and I look forward to doing it with our strong and growing team," he says.

[Read the Ombudsman's full message here](#)

IN BRIEF: TOP 10 HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR WORK IN 2018



1. CANNABIS CONCERNS: Shortly after cannabis was legalized in October, our office began receiving a large amount of calls about the Ontario Cannabis Store (OCS), the province's single retail outlet for recreational marijuana. We received more than 2,300 complaints in

a matter of weeks about delayed deliveries, poor customer service and billing problems. Our office quickly established regular contact with senior OCS officials so we could flag issues to them and ensure they were dealt with efficiently. [Read more here.](#)



2. DRIVING CHANGE: The province agreed to all of the Ombudsman's recommendations to overhaul the way it notifies drivers whose licences are suspended, after his September report, [Suspended State](#), revealed that many drivers had no idea that their licences were suspended and were invalid.



3. OPEN TO ALL: As our office completes its 10th year of [oversight of municipal meetings](#) – promoting the open meeting rules in the *Municipal Act* – we are preparing to launch a new digital search tool for all of the Ombudsman's hundreds of reports on closed meeting investigations. Watch this space next month for

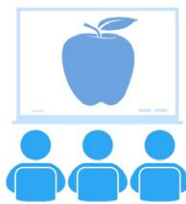
more on our new Open Meeting Digest!



4. NIAGARA NEWS: Two formal investigations of Niagara regional council made news in 2018 – in July, the Ombudsman's report [Press Pause](#) determined that council was wrong to eject a reporter and citizen blogger from a meeting and seize their property. And in August, the Ombudsman launched [a new investigation](#) – which is ongoing – into the hiring process of the region's Chief Administrative Officer.



5. MUNICIPAL MOVEMENT: Of the thousands of complaints our office receives about municipalities (2,491 complaints about 323 municipalities in 2017-2018), all but a handful were resolved without need for a formal investigation or report. But in one such report in April, [By-law Surprise](#), the Ombudsman revealed how a township resident was wrongly billed \$11,000 in by-law enforcement charges that were incurred without her knowledge – and he urged municipal officials to “do the right thing” and apologize.



6. TEACHABLE MOMENTS: Our office reviewed nearly 900 complaints about school boards in fiscal 2017-2018, and helped several improve their practices, for example, how they communicate about student transportation or school closings. One formal investigation is pending, involving a school closure decision by the Near North District School Board. Complaints about universities and colleges are also on the rise. Read more in our Annual Report about [early years to Grade 12](#) and about [post-secondary education](#).



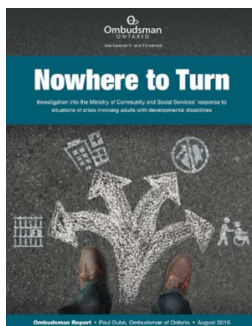
7. GOING BEHIND BARS: Ombudsman Paul Dubé and staff visited correctional facilities across the province to listen to concerns of frontline staff and hear firsthand about issues in this consistently high-volume source of complaints. We handled [more than 5,000 complaints from provincial inmates in fiscal 2017-2018](#).



8. WATCHDOG TRAINING: As we have done every year for the past decade, our office welcomed ombudsmen and administrative investigators from across Canada and around the world in Toronto in November for our annual training course in conducting systemic investigations, Sharpening Your Teeth.



9. AMBULANCE RESPONSE: In May, the Ombudsman launched a [systemic investigation](#) into how the province oversees patient complaints and incident reports about ambulance services. The investigation is in the final stages and a report will be drafted in the new year.



10. ONGOING IMPROVEMENT: The Ombudsman follows up on his recommendations to ensure public sector bodies follow through on their commitment to implement them. Two notable examples since 2016 – improvements to developmental services continue in the wake of our report [Nowhere to Turn](#), and the Ontario Police College committed to beefing up de-escalation training, as the Ombudsman recommended in [A Matter of Life and Death](#).

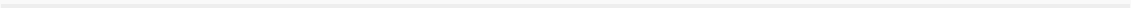
SEE YOU IN THE NEW YEAR!

Ombudsman Paul Dubé and staff from the office will be at the [Rural Ontario Municipalities Association \(ROMA\) annual conference](#) at the Sheraton Centre in Toronto on January 27 and 28. Stop by our booth to say hello and pick up new materials and resources.



[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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