

New tools to help run effective open meetings, and our latest outreach initiatives -- read all about it in our January 2019 newsletter.

[View this email in your browser](#)



Twitter



Facebook



LinkedIn

NEW YEAR, NEW RESOURCES! PROMOTE TRANSPARENCY WITH THESE OPEN MEETINGS REFERENCE TOOLS



The Ombudsman has released two new reference tools designed for municipal officials and the public, to help ensure that the province's open meeting laws are consistently applied.

Under the *Municipal Act*, meetings of municipal councils, local boards and their committees must be open to the public, with certain narrow exceptions. Every municipality is required to have an investigator for complaints about closed meetings.

Our Office's [new digital case digest](#) allows users to search hundreds of decisions from our investigations of closed municipal meetings (dating back to 2008). The decisions can be searched by topic, municipality and specific points of law. The digest is a valuable resource for all municipal stakeholders, where they can look up the applicable laws and the definitions used by our Office and see how they have been applied.

"Our general guideline for open meetings has always been 'when in doubt, open the meeting,'" said Ombudsman Paul Dubé. "Now we can also say, 'when in doubt, look it up in our digest.'"

As well, [the latest edition of the Ombudsman's quick reference guide to Ontario's open meeting rules](#) is now available. Previously known as the *Sunshine Law Handbook*, the new guide, titled [Open Meetings: Guide for Municipalities](#), is a pocket-sized guide which includes tips and best practice suggestions for municipal officials, and incorporates recent changes to the *Municipal Act, 2001*. Copies of the guide will be mailed out to municipal councillors, and [it is also available online to download and print](#).

"Our staff frequently get questions from municipal officials and the public about when it's okay to close a meeting," Mr. Dubé said. "Although we can't give legal advice, sharing tips and best practices is an important part of our work in improving governance generally."

[Browse the open meetings case digest here](#)

[Check out Open Meetings: Guide for Municipalities here](#)





MORE TOOLS AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Our office works collaboratively with municipalities to resolve issues quickly and efficiently. We also provide great resources for municipal council members and staff - such as wallet-sized tip cards that cover everything from when to close a meeting to best practices for creating a local complaint process. [Print or view our municipal tip cards online here.](#)



HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE

MORE FOR MUNICIPALITIES

Ombudsman Paul Dubé and staff were at the [Rural Ontario Municipalities Association \(ROMA\) annual conference](#) in Toronto in late January,



meeting newly elected municipal council members, answering questions about how we work with municipalities, and distributing helpful resources.

Our brand-new [Open Meetings: Guide for Municipalities](#) was in high demand as municipal council members and staff

discussed the open meeting requirements, including several new exceptions that came into effect last year.

Our [new digital case digest](#) was quickly recognized as a valuable tool for navigating our Office's hundreds of decisions from municipal meeting investigations. When invited to try [the digest](#), attendees were impressed with its ease of use and flexibility in finding useful and relevant information "quickly and efficiently."

Our staff also received comments and questions about upcoming legislative changes, which will require all municipalities provide access to integrity commissioners as of March 1, 2019. We reminded delegates that the Ontario Ombudsman does not act as an integrity commissioner. However, complaints can be brought to the Ombudsman as a last resort – that is, if the locally appointed integrity commissioner has reviewed the matter or declined to do so, and the complainant is not satisfied. [Learn more about our oversight of municipalities.](#)

OO TALKS TO OPSBA

Counsel Jean-Frédéric Hübsch spoke at the [Ontario Public School Boards Association's Public Education Symposium](#) on Jan. 25. He discussed how we resolve most school boards complaints through early resolution and referral, and almost always without need for a formal investigation. Read more about how we handle school board issues [here](#).





ICYMI: TOP 10 HIGHLIGHTS OF 2018

What did we get up to last year? Among our Office's major achievements were full buy-in from the Ministry of Transportation to overhaul the way it notifies drivers whose licences are suspended, thanks to the recommendations in our investigation report, [Suspended State](#); successful collaboration with the Ontario Cannabis Store to address [thousands of complaints from dissatisfied customers](#); and the launch of a [new systemic investigation](#) into how the province oversees patient complaints and incident reports about ambulance services - stay tuned for our findings and recommendations this year!

[Browse the rest of our Top 10 Highlights of 2018 here.](#)

LEARN MORE: INDIVIDUAL RESOLUTIONS

A student in a combined college and university nursing program was 1.5% short of the grade she needed to progress. When her appeal to re-evaluate a major part of the course wasn't addressed, we stepped in. [Read about how we helped.](#)



[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.

Copyright © 2019 Ontario Ombudsman, All rights reserved.

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#)