

Read about an update on the Ontario Cannabis Store, complaints concerning changes to autism services funding, upcoming conferences, and more in our March 2019 newsletter.

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OMBUDSMAN RECEIVES MORE THAN 2,400 COMPLAINTS ABOUT ONTARIO CANNABIS STORE SINCE LEGALIZATION



With cannabis retail stores set to open on April 1, the Ombudsman has been in regular contact with the Ontario Cannabis Store (OCS) and the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO).

To date, our office has received more than 2,400 complaints about the OCS since the legalization of recreational cannabis on October 17, 2018. The OCS has been responsive to our enquiries and feedback. As a result, we have been able to resolve the majority of the complainants so far by working with OCS to address issues during this start-up phase of its operations.

Many of the complaints we received about the OCS were related to communication issues, delivery delays, and a customer service process that was difficult to access, with customers complaining about a lack of information or incorrect information about the status

of their orders.

In one such case, a customer placed an order with the OCS, which was delivered in November. Once delivered, she discovered the product was moldy. She contacted the OCS and was told she could send the product back for a refund, but that it would be subject to a \$10 return shipping fee. She reached out to our Office to see if we could help. We spoke to an OCS representative, who confirmed the return fee was incorrect, and the customer was able to return her product without incurring any fees.

Although our office will not oversee the private retail operations of cannabis licensees, we can review complaints received about issues pertaining to the AGCO. We will also continue to review and resolve complaints about the OCS. More details about complaint trends and resolutions related to the OCS and the AGCO will be available in our annual report, to be released in June.

CHANGES TO AUTISM SERVICES FUNDING MODEL SPARK COMPLAINTS

The Ombudsman has received more than 500 complaints in recent weeks regarding the government's decision to change the funding model for services for children with autism. Most of these have focused on the government's decision itself. Our staff are in the process of contacting complainants to explain that the Ombudsman does not review broad government decisions about setting policy and/or allocating funding and services, as these are the types of decisions that elected governments are mandated to make.

However, the Ombudsman can review the administrative conduct of public sector bodies, and we are reviewing all complaints to determine whether there are any relevant administrative aspects (e.g., delays in communication or in conducting assessments) that warrant a closer look.

Anyone who is has been unable to resolve their service-related complaints with their regional office of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services can complain to the Ombudsman and we will determine how we may be of assistance.

If you'd like to contact us directly to make a complaint, you can email us at info@ombudsman.on.ca, call us at 1-800-263-1830, or fill out a form online here: <https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/have-a-complaint>.



[Submit a complaint](#)

OMBUDSMAN UPDATES PLAN FOR NEW CHILD AND YOUTH MANDATE

On May 1, the Ontario Ombudsman will assume certain functions of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (the Child Advocate), as mandated by the *Restoring Trust, Transparency and Accountability Act, 2018* (or Bill 57).

To fulfill this new mandate, the Ombudsman will create a dedicated Child and Youth unit, which will be led by Diana Cooke, the Child Advocate's Director of Investigations, and include some of the existing specialized staff from the Child Advocate's office.

As of May 1, the Ombudsman will receive complaints from and in relation to children and youth, and address these complaints using our office's early resolution and investigations models. However, as previously announced, because the legislation transfers investigative powers to the Ombudsman with regards to child protection matters, but not the advocacy function, the Advocate's office in Thunder Bay, which was devoted to delivering advocacy services, will cease operations as of April 5. All open files will be transferred to the Toronto office.

Advocacy services will continue to be delivered through the Advocate's Toronto office until Bill 57 takes effect on May 1. Ms. Cooke will be named Interim Advocate when Child Advocate Irwin Elman retires on March 31.

"My colleague, Mr. Elman, brings expertise and passion to his work. We are thankful for his guidance as we make this transition," Ombudsman Paul Dubé said. "Mr. Elman's dedication for ensuring children's voices are heard has brought their issues to the forefront and allowed them the power and confidence to speak for themselves. We will build on his legacy as we continue to advocate for fairness and work towards better governance in our new areas of oversight."

In the coming months, the Ombudsman will also consult with northern and Indigenous communities to ensure they are aware of and can access the Ombudsman's services.

"We have been working towards a smooth transition of responsibilities, and are committed

to ensuring child and youth voices continue to be heard,” said Dubé. “Our office has long had oversight of services impacting children – from youth custody facilities, to demonstration schools and school boards, to the Child and Family Services Review Board. With experienced investigators from the former Advocate’s team, we are well-placed to capably address problems from children and youth and make recommendations for positive, systemic change.”

OMBUDSMAN TO HOST LANGUAGE CONFERENCE IN JUNE



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LANGUAGE COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DES COMMISSAIRES LINGUISTIQUES

VIth ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**Protecting Linguistic Minorities,
Building Stronger Societies**

JUNE 26 AND 27, 2019

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SIMPSON TOWER 8th FLOOR, 401 BAY STREET
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VI^e CONFÉRENCE INTERNATIONALE ANNUELLE

**Protéger les minorités linguistiques,
bâtir des sociétés plus fortes**

26 ET 27 JUIN 2019

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The Ombudsman will host the [annual conference of the International Association of Language Commissioners](#) on June 26 and 27, 2019 in Toronto. Join us if you’re interested in language rights and the protection of minority languages. The conference brings together representatives from international organizations and state governments, language commissioners, ombudsmen, experts, and community groups from all over the world.

Guest speakers this year include [Fernand de Varennes, the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues](#), and [Canadian Supreme Court Justice Richard Wagner](#). Conference sessions will cover topics including shared perspectives on preserving indigenous languages (2019 is the [UN International Year of Indigenous languages](#)), effective representation of linguistic minorities via independent institutions, the limits and opportunities of multilingual societies, best practices in setting standards, the role of technology, and the debate on whether non-binding recommendations help or hinder the preservation of minority languages.

Early-bird tickets are on sale until April 15 – register here

HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE



If you're attending the biennial conference of the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman and Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons in Toronto in April, don't miss Ontario Ombudsman Paul Dubé and New Brunswick Ombudsman Charles Murray presenting about "issue creep" and how to keep your investigation focused.

At the same event, Deputy Ombudsman Barbara Finlay will also be on a panel discussing the importance of having a post-secondary ombudsman, and General Counsel Laura Pettigrew is running a session on writing persuasive reports and recommendation. [To learn more about the conference and sign up, click here.](#)

You'll also spot our staff next month at the [Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association's 2019 Annual Conference](#) in Thunder Bay, from April 24 - 26. We'll have some of our municipal investigation reports on hand, as well as other helpful resources. Stop by our booth to pick up copies, say hello and learn more about our office.

Attention new MPPs!

New MPPs and staff: Don't miss your chance to hear from Ombudsman Paul Dubé and Chief Electoral Officer of Ontario Greg Essensa from 8:30 to 10:00 a.m. in the Legislative Library on April 1, 2019!

CASE SUMMARY: IT'S IN THE (E)MAIL

A woman contacted our Office after learning her OHIP coverage had been suspended while she was studying outside of Ontario, despite the fact that she had emailed her renewal documents to OHIP several times. [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.

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