

Our annual training course for watchdogs, two municipal meeting investigations in the news, and more.

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In this month's newsletter:

- More than 80 watchdogs attended our annual “Sharpening Your Teeth” training
- Ombudsman finds violations in closed meetings in Hamilton and West Nipissing
- Here, there, and everywhere – important events we attended in October
- How we helped - read some of our successful case resolutions

WATCHDOGS GATHER FOR “SHARPENING YOUR TEETH” TRAINING

The 2019 edition of "Sharpening Your Teeth," the Ombudsman's annual advanced investigative training course for administrative watchdogs, welcomed more than 80 participants to Toronto, Oct. 21-23.

They came from ombudsman offices as far as Uganda, Hong Kong and the U.S., as well as from other investigative bodies in Ontario and across Canada, including the newly-established Ombud for the Northwest Territories. Sessions included training in conducting systemic investigations, interviewing, report writing, and best practices for media and social media engagement.

Ombudsman Paul Dubé was honoured to welcome Canada's Commissioner of Official Languages Raymond Thérberge as the keynote speaker. Commissioner Thérberge stressed the importance of ensuring that the practices of oversight bodies remain relevant, and foster positive change: "You always have to be revisiting your processes to make sure that you're keeping up with changes in the real world," he said, noting that his own office recently created new tools to help federal bodies comply with the *Official Languages Act*.

Commissioner Thérberge encouraged administrative watchdogs to deliver more than "report cards" and criticism to the bodies they oversee – instead, they should "tell them what they need to change to get better."



OMBUDSMAN FINDS VIOLATIONS IN MEETINGS IN HAMILTON, WEST NIPISSING

Two controversial meetings of a Hamilton city council committee – held at a Niagara-on-the-Lake resort – did not violate the law, but part of one was

illegally closed to the public, the Ombudsman found in a [report](#) released Oct. 4.

Council's City Manager recruitment committee was permitted to hold closed meetings out of town to interview job applicants, but a "breakdown in communication" at the first meeting broke the rules. Our office received 77 complaints about the meetings on February 9 and 23, the most we have ever received about a single case.

In a [report](#) issued Oct. 3, the Ombudsman found that a "chaotic" closed council meeting in West Nipissing on March 19 was illegal because it did not fit within any of the permissible exceptions in the *Municipal Act*. Witnesses described the meeting as "toxic" and "traumatic," the Ombudsman wrote. "

Some council members felt that the fact that the meeting took place outside of the public eye was an important reason why the discussion became chaotic."

[Contact us here if you have a question or complaint](#)

HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE



BONJOUR, SUDBURY

Ombudsman staff attended the annual conference of the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario in Sudbury, Oct. 24-25, along with some 300 Franco-Ontarian leaders, government and agency representatives and members of the francophone community.

The conference included workshops and speakers on innovation, community engagement and modernization of the *French Language Services Act*.

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND STUDENT WELL-BEING

We were invited to share examples of how we help with complaints about special education and related issues with professionals in the school sector as part of the Osgoode Hall Professional Development for Educators training on Oct. 24 in Toronto.



And our staff also met with guidance counsellors, student success teachers, administrators, educators and career education experts from across the province at the Ontario School Counsellors' Association conference Oct. 17-18 at the University of Toronto Mississauga.



We explained our role in taking complaints from young people about issues with children's aid societies, school boards, universities, or programs like the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). Delegates were eager to hear about our resources for students and educators, including those on the [Children and Youth Unit section of our website](#).

HOW WE CAN HELP - CASE SUMMARIES

Right to complain

When a woman complained to us about how she and her family were treated by a children's aid society, we first advised her to contact her caseworker and raise the issue through the society's internal process. She returned in frustration, saying the caseworker told her the agency has a three-step complaint process and would not give her the requisite form.

Our staff spoke with the caseworker and explained that the law provides complainants the right to initiate a formal complaint at any time, without having to go through any other steps. The woman was contacted by the director of the agency, and was able to pursue her complaint.

Website faux pas

A French-speaking woman sought our help after she encountered difficulties with the website of the Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office. Not only was the French version of the site not equivalent to the English version, it also had sections in English.

We contacted the manager of the organization, who was not aware of the inconsistencies. He promised that the amended French content would be online quickly. The issue was resolved in less than 48 hours, to the benefit of all francophone visitors to the site.

Not on board

An Ontario Works recipient sought our help when he received a letter saying he would have to repay \$1,835 to Ontario Works, and that his monthly income would be reduced by \$202, since no officials had responded to his review request.

Our office learned that the man had mistakenly told his caseworker that he paid “room and board” at his residence, which was interpreted as a rent payment also covering meals. Ontario Works had subsequently reduced payments accordingly. Once the mistake was clarified, Ontario Works quickly waived the repayment request and restored the monthly payments.

[Read about other cases we've resolved](#)

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

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

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