

Discover our Niagara Region investigation report, an update on French language services complaints, and much more.

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In this month's newsletter:

- The Ombudsman's latest investigation found the process for the 2016 hiring of Niagara Region's CAO was "compromised"
- Improvements to our French Language Services Unit complaint handling process
- Ombudsman Dubé shares his vision for improving our office's engagement with Indigenous communities in his keynote speech to the Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being conference in Rama First Nation
- How we helped - read some of our successful case resolutions

**OMBUDSMAN FINDS NIAGARA
CAO HIRING WAS "INSIDE JOB"**



On November 29, 2019, Ombudsman Paul Dubé issued his latest investigation report in a [press release](#) where he calls on the Regional Municipality of Niagara to improve its practices after his investigation found its hiring of former Chief Administrative Officer Carmen D'Angelo was “compromised” by confidential information leaked by insiders in the former Regional Chair’s office.

“The Regional Municipality of Niagara’s 2016 CAO hiring process was an inside job, tainted by the improper disclosure of confidential information to a candidate – a candidate who was ultimately successful and became the region’s most senior administrator,” Mr. Dubé writes in his report, entitled [Inside Job](#).

“Mr. D’Angelo was provided with substantive content to be used in his application materials by insiders who had access to information not available to the general public or to other candidates,” the Ombudsman notes. “The lack of fairness and transparency in the hiring process created controversy and distrust within the region and served to undermine public confidence in local government.”

The investigation focused on three issues: The 2016 CAO hiring process, the amendment and extension of the CAO’s contract in 2017, and the regional municipality’s response to public concerns about the hiring in 2018 – including its appointment of a municipal ombudsman and external governance auditors.

In addition to accepting all of the Ombudsman’s 16 recommendations, Niagara Region has agreed to report publicly and to the Ombudsman’s Office every six months on its progress in implementing them.

This is the Ombudsman’s sixth general investigation of a municipality – and his second

related to Niagara Region – since his mandate was expanded to include full oversight of municipalities as of January 1, 2016. To date, the Ombudsman has received more than 12,000 complaints about municipalities, almost all of which have been resolved informally.

IMPROVING OUR SERVICE FOR FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES

As part of our ongoing work in improving our intake of and response to complaints, our French Language Services Unit's automated web portal for complaints – which was in place prior to May 1, when the role of the former French Language Services Commissioner was transferred to the Ombudsman – has been disabled. All online complaints will now be responded to directly by staff in the French Language Services Unit.

As we do with all complaints our office receives, staff will contact complainants and seek to resolve their issues as quickly as possible (overall, our office resolves 63% of all cases within two weeks), gathering evidence and analyzing potential systemic issues as warranted. Anyone who was using a shortcut to the old form should use the [form on our website](#) or [contact us](#).

The Ombudsman's recruitment of a new French Language Services Commissioner is progressing well. Stay tuned for an announcement when the process is finalized.

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

HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE

Ombudsman meets with Indigenous child and family services agencies



Ombudsman Paul Dubé was the keynote speaker November 21 at the 2019 Indigenous Child and Family Well-Being Conference at Casino Rama Resort, on the territory of the Chippewas of Rama First Nation.

The conference was jointly hosted by Kunuwanimano Child and Family Services and the Association of Native Child and Family Service Agencies of Ontario (ANCFSAO), which represents 12 Indigenous child welfare agencies serving 119 of 133 First Nations, and urban centres across Ontario.

Ombudsman Dubé shared the approach of our Children and Youth Unit in assisting young people, adults and service providers in promoting and protecting the rights of all children and youth in care. He noted that since May 1, the unit has dealt with more than 1,000 complaints about children's aid societies across the province; of those, just over 50 related to Indigenous agencies. (All complaints to date have been resolved.)

The Ombudsman also shared his vision to develop an Indigenous Action Plan for our Office, with the aim of making it more meaningful, helpful and accessible to Indigenous communities.

Mr. Dubé said he envisions the plan, still in its early stages, as an "organizational transformation" within our Office, to ensure that we acknowledge, respect and affirm the

rich culture and history of Indigenous peoples in our daily interactions resolving complaints, and in our role as an effective agent of systemic change.

Through listening, dialogue and mutual learning, the Action Plan will engage with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples on matters within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction and enable our Office to be more relevant and of greater assistance to Indigenous peoples and communities.

Open meetings: Balancing privacy and transparency



How do municipalities satisfy public expectations for transparency when they have closed meetings? Although they must guard against leaks of confidential information, they must also report publicly on what was discussed behind closed doors. The Ombudsman's Senior Counsel, Joanna Bull, was part of a panel discussing this issue at the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario's Municipal Information Access & Privacy Forum on November 15 in Mississauga.

Ms. Bull provided tips for municipal officials on what can and cannot be discussed in closed session, and the importance of keeping detailed minutes in both open and closed meetings. She also demonstrated our Office's [digital digest of open meeting cases](#) – the only tool of its kind in Ontario – which allows officials or the public to search hundreds of specific topics or meeting circumstances, to learn what the Ombudsman has found in investigations of similar situations.

HOW WE CAN HELP - CASE SUMMARIES

On her own

A 16-year-old youth in care of a children's aid society felt that her needs were not being met since she had a change in caseworkers. She told our Children and Youth staff she recently had to go to hospital alone, even after telling her worker she was having health issues. She also said her new worker had not started the process for a Voluntary Youth Services Agreement for her, and she needed a place of her own, winter clothing and food. With her consent, our staff contacted her caseworker to review the youth's concerns. The caseworker said she is actively looking for housing options for the youth. We subsequently followed up with the youth, who confirmed she has since received funding for shelter, clothing and food.

Au revoir, not goodbye

A woman complained to our French Language Services Unit that the Superior Court in Toronto could not serve her in person in French, resulting in a wasted trip and frustration. Our staff contacted the administrative services of the Superior Court to assess the lack of services in French and to identify possible corrective measures. As a result, a Superior Court Services Manager made an appointment with the woman to receive her documents and guide her through the system in French.

Auto-threat

A pensioner who had a longstanding agreement to pay her family support arrears off at \$50/month complained to us that the Family Responsibility Office (FRO) sent her a letter threatening to garnish half of her monthly income, which would leave her with no money to pay her utility bills. When our staff contacted FRO officials, they determined the letter had been automatically generated by their system because of the age of the case. Once the woman confirmed her financial situation remained unchanged, she was able to continue paying \$50/month.

[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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