

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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2020 Vision: Ombudsman reflects on 2019 and sets priorities for new year

Ombudsman Paul Dubé's year-end message takes stock of the historic changes to our Office in the past year, and forecasts an exciting new year. "In 2019, Ombudsman oversight was extended for the first time in Ontario's history to child welfare and French language services," he notes.

"In adding these areas to our mandate, we have worked to combine our proven Ombudsman techniques of complaint resolution and investigation with the expertise of the staff who joined our team from the former offices of the Child Advocate and French Language Services Commissioner. Across all units, we seek to promote fairness, transparency and excellent customer service – not only in the public sector bodies we oversee, but in our own work as well."

Priorities in the new year will include outreach to Indigenous communities and continuing to help as many Ontarians as possible, the Ombudsman says. "We will continue to focus on helping Ontarians who have nowhere else to turn, who need our expertise in rooting out systemic problems in government administration, navigating complex and unfair bureaucracies, and making public services work better."

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

IN BRIEF: TOP 10 HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR WORK IN 2019



1. Corrective Action: As provincial correctional facilities continue to be our top topic of complaint (5,711 in fiscal 2019-2020), the Ombudsman and a specialized team have visited many of them – and, in several cases, prompted officials to take action on unacceptable conditions. In December, Mr. Dubé visited Thunder Bay Jail, where staff and inmates alike spoke of the serious

challenges at the outdated facility. We alert correctional and Ministry officials to cases where health and safety are at risk. [Read more on our work with correctional services.](#)

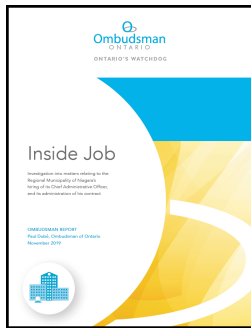


2. Youth Movement: As of May 1, the Ombudsman can investigate complaints about children's aid societies, foster homes and group homes, secure treatment programs and youth custody facilities. Our Children and Youth Unit (which assumed the investigative function of the former Child Advocate) has handled more than 1,300 complaints, helping young people in care sort out issues and making sure they have information about their rights. Ombudsman staff have also visited several youth custody facilities. Check out our [resources for Children and Youth](#) in care, and [case examples](#).



3. Bienvenue, French Language Services: Within weeks of assuming the mandate of the former office of the French Language Services Commissioner, the Ombudsman and our French Language Services Unit hosted the annual conference of the International Association of Language Commissioners in June, which focused on the protection of minority language rights around the world. Ombudsman Dubé also launched a national search and engaged an expert panel to hire a Commissioner, and expects to announce the successful candidate in the coming weeks. In the interim, he has served as commissioner as our FLS Unit has continued to respond to complaints and identify issues. [Read our case examples](#).

4. Inside Niagara's CAO Hiring: In November, the Ombudsman released his investigative report *Inside Job*, on what



he found to be the “unjust” and “unreasonable” leaking of inside information to a candidate for the job of Niagara Region’s Chief Administrative Officer. Regional council accepted all of the Ombudsman’s recommendations to improve its practices. [Read the report](#) and [find out more about how we handle municipal complaints](#).



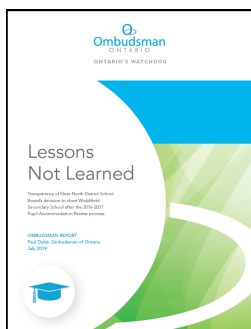
5. Offsite But Not Offside: Although the Ombudsman has only had full oversight of municipalities since 2016, we have been able to investigate complaints about closed municipal meetings since 2008. And in all that time, we’ve never had more complaints than the 77 we received when a Hamilton committee met outside of the city last February, to interview candidates for City Manager. The

Ombudsman found the offsite meetings were not illegal, but urged the city to ensure public notice is provided for all committee meetings. [Read about the report](#).



6. Open (Meeting) Source: What can municipal councils and committees do to make sure they follow the open meeting rules? When in doubt, they can check what the Ombudsman has said about similar situations. In January, we launched a digital digest of

the Ombudsman’s open meeting reports and decisions dating back to 2008, searchable by keyword, municipality and *Municipal Act* reference. Along with the [digest](#) – the only resource of its kind in Ontario – anyone interested in the open meeting rules can also consult our pocket-sized [guide](#), *Open Meetings: Guide for Municipalities*.



7. Lesson Learned at Last: The Ombudsman’s investigation of the Near North District School Board’s decision to close a North Bay school found that the board not only failed to follow a “rigorous and transparent process,” it neglected to take steps to do so after a similar situation in 2013. This time, the board agreed to revisit its process and accepted all the recommendations in the Ombudsman’s August report, *Lessons Not Learned*. Read [about the report](#) and check out our work on [Education case trends](#).

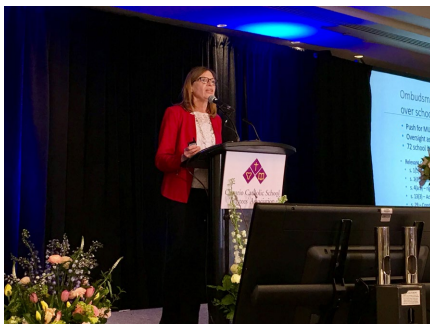


8. A Remarkable Year: As the Ombudsman remarked in his [Annual Report](#) in June, the 2018-2019 fiscal year was a “defining moment” for our Office in many ways. Along with the historic expansion of our mandate, a 30% surge in complaints allowed us to help more Ontarians than ever before, and to educate the public on what an Ombudsman can and cannot do.



9. Training Other Watchdogs: More than 80 staff from ombudsman offices and other investigative agencies from across Canada and around the world participated in our annual training course in Toronto in October. The 13th edition of “Sharpening Your Teeth: Investigative Training for Administrative Watchdogs” included sessions on planning and

conducting systemic investigations, interviewing, evidence assessment, report writing and public communications.



10. Here, There and Everywhere: Sharing expertise, raising awareness and building relationships are key to the Ombudsman’s mission – that’s why Ombudsman Dubé and staff were present at more than 70 outreach events in 2019. We provided information at stakeholder conferences and public events, delivered speeches and presentations, and worked with colleagues as members of the

International Ombudsman Institute (Ombudsman Dubé is president for North America) and numerous other watchdog groups.

SEE YOU IN THE NEW YEAR!

Ombudsman Dubé and staff will be at the Rural Ontario Municipalities Association annual conference at the Sheraton Centre

in Toronto, January 19-21. Stop by our booth to chat and learn more about our resources for municipalities.



File a complaint online or contact us

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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