

Ontario has a new French Language Services Commissioner; Ombudsman investigates Landlord and Tenant Board delays; plus our latest outreach and cases

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In this month's newsletter:

- New French Language Services Commissioner appointed
- Ombudsman launches investigation into Landlord and Tenant Board delays
- “Ontario’s Watchdog” stands on guard for youth in care
- Ombudsman attends Rural Ontario Municipal Association's conference

**OMBUDSMAN APPOINTS
KELLY BURKE AS
DEPUTY OMBUDSMAN AND
FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES
COMMISSIONER**



On January 13, 2020, Ombudsman Paul Dubé announced in a [press release](#) that Ms. Kelly Burke had just joined his office as Ontario's new French Language Services Commissioner and Deputy Ombudsman. Ms. Burke was chosen by Mr. Dubé and an expert panel in a nationwide search. "A tremendous effort was made to find the best person in Canada to fill this role, and I am confident we have done that," Mr. Dubé said. "I am thrilled to have found Ms. Burke and I know she will be the successful champion of language rights we all want as Commissioner."

A "passionate Franco-Ontarian" originally from Cornwall, Ms. Burke is fluent in both official languages. She is a lawyer and former teacher who has nearly two decades' experience in senior roles within the Ontario Public Service. Most recently, Ms. Burke served as Assistant Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. Prior to that, she worked in the Ministry of Francophone Affairs from 2014 to January 2019 as Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Administrative Officer, serving as Interim Deputy Minister for part of 2015.

Ms. Burke stressed that as Commissioner, she will be proactive, visible, and accessible to the francophone community. She will seek to build relationships and capitalize on the independence and credibility of the Ombudsman's Office to promote French language services in Ontario.

"I am particularly enthusiastic about the opportunity to continue working to promote French Language service rights, something I have done throughout my professional career... I sought out this role because it provides me with a unique opportunity to contribute my knowledge and experience to the promotion of French language service rights within an

organization that is known to be effective. With the expertise and resources of the Ombudsman's Office to draw upon, I am enthusiastic about what the French Language Services Unit will be able to accomplish for francophones and francophiles in Ontario," Ms. Burke said at [a press conference](#) on January 15.

- [Commissioner Burke comments on historic agreement to fund L'Université de l'Ontario français](#)



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OMBUDSMAN LAUNCHES INVESTIGATION INTO LANDLORD AND TENANT BOARD

In early January, Ombudsman Dubé announced a systemic investigation into serious delays at the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB), the administrative tribunal that resolves residential tenancy disputes.

The Ombudsman has received more than 100 complaints about delays in LTB hearings and decisions over the past nine months – an increase from about 80 for all of fiscal 2018-2019. "What we're seeing in some of these complaints is that delays have a very real human impact," the Ombudsman said in a [press release](#). "For example, when a landlord whose family relies on the rental income of a property has to go without that money for months before the LTB even schedules a hearing. Or when a tenant who has asked for repairs or is threatened with eviction has to live in limbo, waiting for the board's decision."

Conducted by the Special Ombudsman Response Team (SORT), the investigation will focus on whether the government is taking adequate steps to address delayed hearings and decisions.

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HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE

ROMA conference 2020



For the fifth straight year, Ombudsman Dubé and staff once again met with municipal stakeholders at the annual Rural Ontario Municipalities Association conference in Toronto, January 19-20. Our staff answered questions about closed meeting investigations, codes of conduct, and integrity commissioners – noting that the Ombudsman does not act as an integrity commissioner, but can review complaints about them. Visitors to our booth picked up copies of our [pocket Guide to Open Meetings](#), our [Municipal Tip Cards](#) and our latest municipal investigation report, [Inside Job](#). They also learned how to use [our digital Digest of open meeting cases](#), which allows users to search hundreds of the Ombudsman's decisions on municipal meetings that were closed to the public.

[Click here to learn more about our oversight of municipalities](#)

Ontario's Watchdog stands guard for youth in care



Our office's motto is "**Ontario's Watchdog**," because it's our job to watch out for problems in government administration, and to speak when we find things going wrong. It's also a way to help people understand our role, such as young people in care, who may feel they aren't heard or have nowhere to turn in the child welfare system.

The Ombudsman's Children and Youth Unit has brought the "watchdog" to life in our social media messages and outreach materials, featuring friendly four-pawed companions illustrating how the Ombudsman can help. The Unit has plans to reach out to residences, agencies and institutions across the province in the coming weeks and months.

Ombudsman hosts Canadian child advocates' meeting

On January 21-22, our office hosted fellow members of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates ([CCCYA](#)) for the group's quarterly meeting. The CCCYA's mandate is to advance the rights of children and youth, promote their voice and discuss issues affecting young people across Canada. Its September 2019 report, [A National Paper on Youth Suicide](#), noted that suicide is the second leading cause of death among 10- to 24-year-olds in Canada, and too many youth have unaddressed mental health needs.

HOW WE CAN HELP - CASE SUMMARIES

The right process

A mother called our Children and Youth Unit after her local children's aid society told her it would not review her complaint due to a lack of information. The agency had a policy that stated a complaint must first be filed with a caseworker, then a supervisor, before it could be submitted to its internal complaint review process. Our staff determined that the agency did not follow existing government guidelines on processing a complaint, which say a panel must be convened so the complainant can discuss their matter with people not involved in the case. We ensured the mother had her complaint reviewed.

Hold, s'il vous plait

A francophone man complained to our French Language Services Unit that he waited an hour on the phone for service in French when he called the disability eligibility decision unit of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. He finally hung up in frustration, called back and chose the service option in English – and was served in less than 15 minutes. Our staff reviewed the man's case and contacted the service manager, who quickly acknowledged the lack of service in French and undertook to develop and implement policies to ensure bilingual service.

Fine treatment

A man wanted to dispute a \$40 parking ticket but when he called municipal staff to schedule a hearing, he was told it had already taken place. He complained to us that he received no notice, and no one from the municipality would answer his calls and emails – meanwhile, the unpaid fine had escalated to \$208. Our staff spoke to a manager at the municipality, who reviewed the file and discovered several errors. The municipality agreed to cancel the fine, contacted the Ministry of Transportation to withdraw its penalty for an unpaid fine, and sent the man an explanation and apology.

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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.

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