

This month, as offices and businesses are closed across the country due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Ombudsman and staff are working from home, committed to helping Ontarians

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In this month's newsletter:

- How the Ombudsman can help in these challenging times
- French Language Services Commissioner Burke on public health messages
- Working from home – and hiring, too

Ombudsman's message: Ensuring public services for the vulnerable in the time of COVID-19

As the Ombudsman and all staff, like most public servants, work from home as part of the province's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, Ombudsman Paul Dubé assured Ontarians that his office continues to work for them.

"With our public services greatly challenged at all levels, and leaders having to make decisions swiftly, based on rapidly changing information, we all must do our part," he said in a [message posted on our website](#). "This means continuing to fulfil our important role in helping Ontarians and public sector officials through the crisis."

"As always, while we are not on the front lines or involved in political decisions, we are here to help by sharing information and identifying gaps in services and processes that result in people being treated unfairly or falling through the cracks."

Among other things, he noted that our teams are answering calls from children and youth in care, engaging regularly with senior correctional service officials about the impact of the outbreak on inmates and staff, ensuring public health messages are issued in English and French, and assisting municipalities in understanding new emergency rules for holding meetings.

Mr. Dubé also issued a separate [statement](#) on March 26 about his concerns regarding COVID-19 and correctional facilities: “My Office is committed to working collaboratively with the Ministry of the Solicitor General to identify and address inmate health and safety issues in a timely manner,” he said. “We wish to thank those who have contacted us on behalf of their loved ones and we want to recognize the extra steps that some facilities have taken to facilitate access to my Office for the inmates as well as its staff.”

- [Read the Ombudsman's full message](#)
- [Read the Ombudsman's full statement on COVID-19 and correctional facilities](#)
- [Contact us online and find updates via our home page](#)



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Commissioner's message: Information in French is essential in times of crisis

French Language Services Commissioner/Deputy Ombudsman Kelly Burke also [commented](#) on the government's response to the COVID-19 outbreak, noting that she has spoken with officials at the Ministry of Health, Public Health Ontario and Telehealth Ontario about the importance of providing information and service in French and English.

“They signalled that they are well aware of the importance of a strong offer of French language services,” she said. [On Twitter](#), she said: “The offer of services in French in the health sector is essential for Francophones to be informed and obtain the care they need.”

Commissioner Burke's message also marked the 50th International Francophonie Day on March 20. “Ontario's francophonie is a reflection of the international francophonie,” she said.

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



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Continuing in care: Ensuring youth don't “age out” during COVID-19 pandemic

On March 26, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services released a policy directive to all children's aid societies aimed at ensuring young people in care continue to receive supports and services even if they reach adulthood during the COVID-19

coronavirus outbreak.

This means that youth in care who are turning 18 are entitled to continue receiving the same supports and services – which may include maintaining residential placements or other living arrangements, and any financial support. As well, those turning 21 who have a Continued Care and Support for Youth (CCSY) agreement with a children's aid society are entitled to continue receiving supports and services.

If you are in this position and have been discharged from care by a children's aid society during this time, or if you have related questions or complaints, please contact the Ombudsman's Children and Youth Unit by calling 1-800-263-2841, [using our online complaint form](#), or emailing cy-ej@ombudsman.on.ca.

Contact us here if you have a question or complaint



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Here, There and Everywhere – events from early March

Celebrating women's leadership



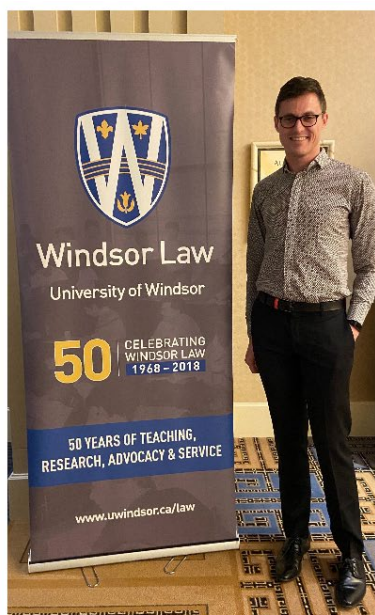
Our Office was proud to celebrate International Women's Day on March 6 and recognize the unique contributions of the exemplary women in our workplace. French Language Services Commissioner Kelly Burke also spoke about leadership as part of the Ministry of the Attorney General's Women Speaker Series, alongside Maud Murray from the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, and Carmen Rossiter of Schulich School of Business.

Listening to Franco-Ontarians, discussing linguistic rights



On March 11 and 12, Commissioner Burke heard from Franco-Ontarians in both Mississauga and Sudbury at two local community roundtables organized by l'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario. Also on March 12, she discussed shared concerns with two of her fellow language commissioners in Ottawa – Federal Official Languages Commissioner Raymond Thérberge, and newly appointed New Brunswick Official Languages Commissioner Shirley MacLean. The three discussed opportunities for collaboration on such issues as access to French language services and the general need for a bilingual workforce.

We're hiring – reaching out to law students and more



Members of our Legal Services team attended career fairs at the University of Ottawa, University of Windsor and Western University in early March, speaking to future lawyers about work opportunities in our Office.

Work with us: We continue to recruit for several [open positions](#). Although our offices are closed, we are reviewing applications, testing candidates and conducting interviews remotely.

Current opportunities include:

- [Director, Special Ombudsman Response Team](#)
- [Investigator, Children and Youth Unit](#)
- [Early Resolution Officers for all of our units: General, French Language Services and Children and Youth](#)
- [Administrative Assistant](#)

How We Can Help: Case Summaries

Failing the test

A man visited a London DriveTest centre with his son, who wanted to take the theory component of the road test, and requested services in French. The person at the counter was unable to provide services in French and did not try to find a French-speaking colleague to help. Our staff spoke with the centre, which committed that in future, it will ensure service in the absence of a bilingual customer service agent, either by seeking the assistance of a French-speaking driving instructor or through referral to another centre that

can provide service by phone.

A cut above

A Black youth living in a rural group home with little access to public transit complained to us that staff would not drive him to get a haircut. Our staff suggested that he speak to his caseworker about the matter, and we followed up with the children's aid society. After the youth told the caseworker the local barber shop was not familiar with the unique hair care needs of Black youth, she offered to drive him to one that was. Under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017*, a service provider is required to take identity characteristics such as race, ancestry, colour and ethnic origin into account when providing services.

Water pressure

A man who received a water bill for more than \$700 – around seven times more than his usual charge – called us in frustration when the local water company told him his previous bills were only estimates, but this one was based on actual use and could not be altered. Our staff confirmed the water meter showed he had apparently used 10 times his typical water consumption. We provided the man with information on how to apply to a program developed by the city's finance department that allows applying for reductions in abnormally high bills, based on financial need.

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



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Did You Know?

The Ombudsman is an impartial officer of the Ontario Legislature, independent of the government and all political parties, who is appointed by an all-party committee of the Legislative Assembly every five years. The Ombudsman is [Mr. Paul Dubé](#), who began his term on April 1, 2016.



[File a complaint 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, 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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