

First anniversary of Ombudsman's new mandate, helping hundreds of Francophones and young people in care, and updates on COVID-related cases.

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In this month's newsletter:

- The Ombudsman marks one year of oversight of two new areas
- French Language Services Commissioner Kelly Burke's May 1st message
- New videos for children and youth in care
- Job openings and COVID-19 case updates

**Ombudsman marks May milestone –
one year of oversight of French language
services and children and youth in care**



It has now been more than a year since the Ombudsman's mandate was expanded to include two new areas: French language services and children and youth in care. In the past 12 months, we have been able to help hundreds of young people and Franco-Ontarians.

"When these new areas of jurisdiction were transferred to us, it quickly became clear that it was a unique opportunity to bring the strengths of the Ombudsman's Office to two important new groups of Ontarians," said Ombudsman Paul Dubé in a [press release](#).

From May 1, 2019 through March 31, 2020, our Children and Youth Unit received more than 1,650 complaints regarding young people in care, and our French Language Services Unit received more than 300. These dedicated units are largely staffed by former employees of the offices of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth and the French Language Services Commissioner, which were closed by government legislation.

"Our new colleagues brought their experience and passion for protecting the rights of vulnerable children and of Franco-Ontarians," the Ombudsman said. "Throughout the past year – including while working at home during the present COVID-19 state of emergency – both units have been there for these populations, ensuring that their concerns are heard and responded to."

The Ombudsman will release more details of recent cases and updates on his investigations in his 2019-2020 Annual Report, which he is preparing to release in late June. Watch our website and social media channels for the date!

Fusion benefits French language rights: Message from the Commissioner

Message from the Commissioner



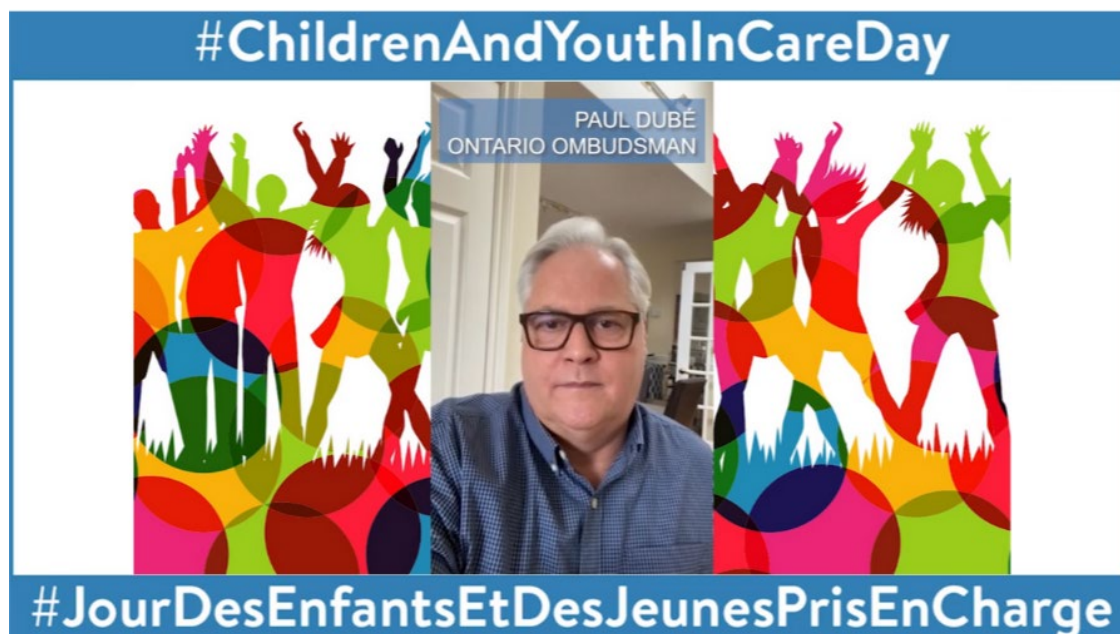
French Language Services Commissioner Kelly Burke also marked the May 1 anniversary with a new message, outlining how the integration of her position within the Ombudsman's Office benefits Francophones and Francophiles: "The key benefit of this fusion is the combination of expert problem solvers. We now have a larger and more powerful team working together to oversee government action affecting Francophones," she said. "We are building on internal and external best practices and applying them to find solutions that ensure that the rights of Ontario Francophones are upheld and needs are being addressed."

Commissioner Burke outlined several positive achievements since her appointment in January 2020, including bilingual lecterns now being used by cabinet ministers during public announcements, and recent efforts to ensure the daily COVID-19 news briefings by the Premier and public health officials include simultaneous translation in French. She cited Premier Doug Ford's recent letter to her, in which he said: "As you noted, Francophones in Ontario have the right to receive communications services in French, equivalent to those offered in English. This is even more critical at this time of crisis."

Ms. Burke also commented on the "warm welcome and pledges of support" she has received from the many groups and individuals in the Franco-Ontarian community she has engaged with, before and during the present state of emergency. "The encouragement from hundreds of stakeholders in a wide range of areas from healthcare, to education, to justice and other general government services has been heartwarming and much appreciated."

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

**Ombudsman to youth in care:
"We see you, and we are here to help"**



On May 14, to mark Children and Youth in Care Day in Ontario, Ombudsman Paul Dubé released a [video message](#) to recognize the past and present contributions of youth in care, and to salute them for their strength and resilience.

Noting that strength and resilience are especially important during the ongoing pandemic, the Ombudsman reminded young people that they can turn to our Office for help if they have concerns about their placements, their safety, or if they just feel isolated: “We are committed to making sure that you are seen and heard, and that your rights are respected,” he said. “We see you, and we are here to help.”

Our Children and Youth Unit staff will respond to calls from young people by phone: Leave a voicemail at 1-800-263-2841 or 416-325-5669.

NEW: Check out our latest video presentation for children and youth

COVID-19 update

As the Ombudsman and all staff continue to work from home, we handle hundreds of complaints every week and our investigations, outreach efforts, preparation of reports, and recruitment of new staff are all ongoing. As of May 28, we have handled more than 2,500 cases since we began working remotely on March 16; more than 630 of these were directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In many of these cases, our staff help complainants connect with public sector officials who may be difficult to reach because they are also working remotely. These have included recipients of family support and disability support (see “How we can help: Case summaries,” below). We also help them find up-to-date information about the effects of the state of emergency on public services.

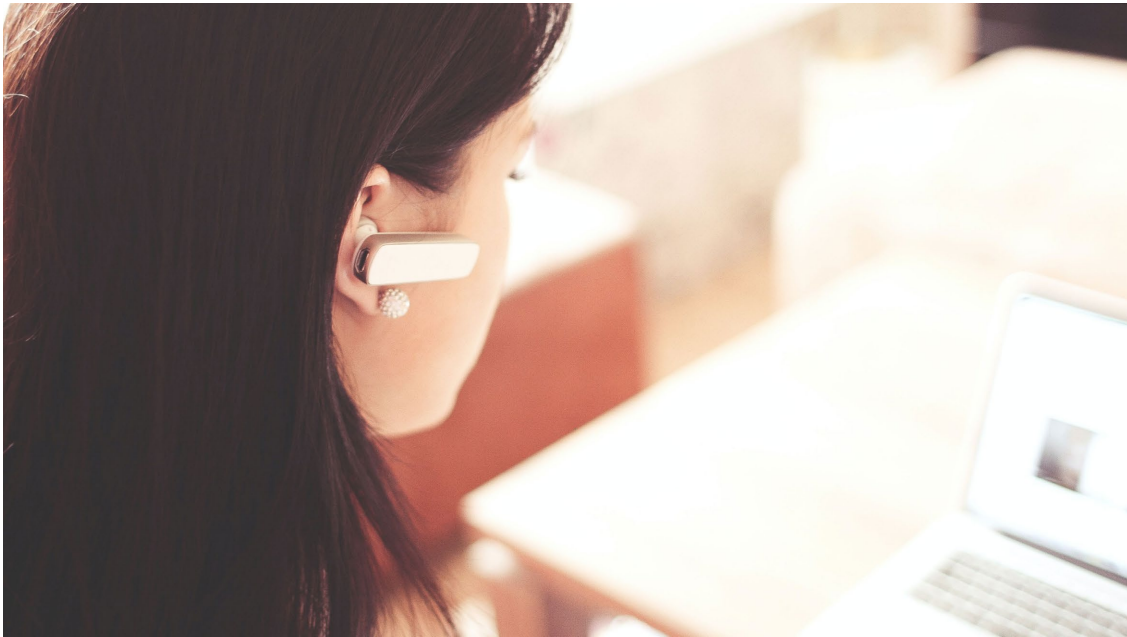
This month, we helped several landlords affected by the suspension of hearings at the Landlord and Tenant Board (LTB), providing them with information about how they can apply for urgent hearings, and other available resources. (Our [systemic investigation](#) of

delays at the LTB is still ongoing.)

We also worked with the Ministry of the Solicitor General to make it easier for inmates in correctional facilities to contact us while our Office's main phone line is closed. Our new temporary phone lines to enable inmates in all five regions of the province to contact us are now toll-free. The numbers are posted in all correctional facilities, and inmates no longer have to use their Ministry-issued "calling cards" to phone us.

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

We're hiring!



Work with us: Our Human Resources staff are busy reviewing applications, testing and interviewing candidates, and welcoming new staff – even as we work remotely. Do any of these open positions interest you?

[Current opportunities](#) include:

- Director, Special Ombudsman Response Team
- Investigator, French Language Services Unit
- Early Resolution Officers
- Articling Student (2021-2022) **NEW**

How we can help - Case summaries

Proof of identity

A man complained to us after he wore a non-medical mask to prevent coronavirus spread inside his local Liquor Board of Ontario (LBCO) outlet, and staff there asked him to remove it so they could verify his identity. He told us he was concerned that this could put his health at risk. We made inquiries with LCBO officials, who explained that checking

identification remains a key part of their security protocol, and staff may request the removal of a face mask to confirm a customer's identity. We provided the man with information about how to provide feedback to the LCBO, as well as contact information for his local public health unit.

Broken telephone

Our staff helped a woman who was having trouble reaching a manager at the Family Responsibility Office (FRO), due to recent changes to its phone system. We spoke with FRO officials and they committed to getting in touch with her, but there was a substantial delay before the woman was able to connect with them. Once she did, our staff followed up with her and she confirmed FRO officials were helping ensure she received the family support she was owed.

Extended parking

A woman sought our help after she was provided with a temporary accessible parking permit with a duration of only five months, when she had previously had one that lasted five years. We confirmed with ServiceOntario that in fact, the woman's doctor had provided new information indicating that she only needed a temporary permit – but they noted that all expiry dates were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We let the woman know that her permit would remain valid until further notice, and also informed her how to submit a new application for a five-year permit.

Our opinion matters

An education worker complained to our French Language Services Unit about a unilingual English survey about technology that was being conducted on behalf of the Ministry of Education. Because it was in English only, she said the survey - done by a third party - excluded the views of Francophone teachers and staff of the province's 12 French-language school boards. We raised the issue with the Ministry, and as a result, it ensured that a French translation of the survey was created and sent a few days later to the French-language boards. The Ministry also committed to ensuring that the next phase of the survey would be done simultaneously in French and English.

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



[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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