

45 years of fighting for fairness, Dress Purple Day, the French Language Services Commissioner "in the spotlight" and more in our October newsletter

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[45 years of fighting for fairness](#)



This month, the Office of the Ontario Ombudsman turned 45 – a milestone for an office that the first Ombudsman, Arthur Maloney, called “a guardian for citizens’ rights.” Since his swearing-in on October 30, 1975, we have handled nearly 1 million complaints from individual Ontarians, and our systemic investigations have prompted government reforms affecting millions more.

Ontario was the seventh province to establish a parliamentary Ombudsman, as the result of 10 consecutive years of bills introduced by MPP Vernon Singer. Fittingly, Ombudsman Maloney said his Office was “an idea whose time has come.”

Over four-and-a-half decades and the terms of seven Ombudsmen, much has changed, but our mission has consistently reflected Maloney’s observation that “the role of the public administration has become so great that the impact of its activities affects us all in almost all aspects of our lives.”

Many of the issues flagged by the Ombudsmen of the ‘70s, ‘80s and ‘90s continue to be top topics of complaints today – including conditions in provincial [correctional facilities](#), services for people with [developmental disabilities](#), the [Family Responsibility Office](#), and [municipal services](#). And since 2015, our Office’s mandate has been expanded twice, to cover almost every area of the broader public sector in Ontario, as well as children and youth in care and French language services.



Ombudsman Dubé reflected on the value that offices like ours strive to bring to the people we serve, in a new video released to mark international **Ombuds Day** on October 8.

“Being an Ombudsman takes helping others to a whole new level,” he says in the video, which includes several of his Canadian counterparts. “I lead an exceptional team that helps tens of thousands of people receive fair and transparent services from government agencies. And I help public sector bodies improve their processes so they can avoid future complaints.”

To learn more about our Office’s history, see our [website](#), or search our #OO45 posts on Twitter.

[Hear from other provincial ombuds about how their offices help citizens.](#)

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## [Children and Youth - Video](#)



Our Children and Youth Unit is always looking for ways to help service providers ensure that children and youth in care understand their rights, including their right to contact us. In our [latest video](#), Ombudsman Paul Dubé narrates a series of accessible, child-friendly slides that explain when and why young people should contact us, and what we can do to help them.

We encourage service providers to use this video as a resource to inform young people about our Office. Special thanks to Oxford CAS for agreeing to link to this video on their website, after our presentation to their staff in mid-October!

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## [Dress Purple Day](#)



October is Child Abuse Prevention Month, and Ontario's Children's Aid Societies encouraged everyone to wear purple on October 27 to mark "Dress Purple Day" – an annual awareness event highlighting the important role that adults and communities play in supporting vulnerable children, youth and families.

As part of our Office's support of this effort, Ombudsman Paul Dubé released a new [video message](#) to let children and youth know that we are here to listen, to look into their concerns, and direct them to get the help they need.

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[Here, there, and \(virtually\) everywhere](#)



### **OEMC goes virtual**

Our Office continues to participate in virtual outreach to share our mandate and topical cases with our stakeholders. On October 22, General Counsel Laura Pettigrew spoke at the Ontario East Municipal Conference. Ms. Pettigrew explained how our Office works collaboratively with municipalities to resolve complaints. She also walked attendees through our latest municipal investigative report, [Inside Job](#), which examined hiring practices in the Regional Municipality of Niagara.

### **Online learning**

On October 23, Paul Sloan, Manager of Early Resolutions, delivered a virtual presentation for the Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association during a training program for teachers and administrators interested in supervisory officer roles within a school board. Mr. Sloan shared how our Office focuses on administrative conduct and fairness when handling school board complaints. Read more about how our Office works with school boards on our [website](#).

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## **[French Language Services Commissioner "in the spotlight"](#)**

# Sous les projecteurs



Kelly Burke, Commissaire aux services en français



Peter Hominuk, directeur général de l'AFO

## Agir pour l'avenir

French Language Services Commissioner Kelly Burke was the first invitee of the week at this year's virtual Annual General Assembly of the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario (AFO), which took place October 19-24. In a [20-minute interview for the pre-recorded segment "Sous les projecteurs \(In the Spotlight\)"](#), she explained her vision for French public services in Ontario and her work handling complaint resolutions, identifying underlying systemic issues and promoting French language rights. (In French only)

Earlier this month, [in an interview with Toronto Francophone radio station CHOQ-FM 105.1](#), Commissioner Burke provided an overview of her mandate and her accomplishments in leading our French Language Services Unit since January.

Commissioner Burke also sent several virtual greetings and updates to meetings of such groups as Reflet Salveo (which promotes access to health services in French) and the Centre Francophone du Grand Toronto. Her most [recent video](#), marking the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Entité4, which works to improve access to health services in French in the GTA, was [posted on Twitter](#) on October 27.

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## [How we can help: Case summaries](#)



### [A better way](#)

A 13-year-old racialized youth complained to us after her children's aid society (CAS) called the police to transport her to a new group home – which they did by handcuffing her and placing her in the back of a police vehicle. She had refused to go to the new home because it was not in the city she had requested, and far from her home community.

Our Children and Youth Unit staff spoke with several CAS workers and the teen. We were told that the CAS only seeks police assistance in rare cases when youth refuse to be transported, or if there are safety concerns, but it did not have a formal policy on when to involve police. At our request, the CAS reviewed its practices, and as a result of this review, it acknowledged that involving police could result in some highly-charged situations, and the inadvertent criminalization of youth in care.

The CAS is working with police on their approach to dealing with youth, and now requires staff to obtain the service director's approval before contacting police. It intends to create a formal policy, and will share it with our Office. The youth has since been moved to a foster home in the area she originally requested.

### [Right-ing on the wall](#)

A 16-year-old who has a developmental disability and lives in a group home contacted us to raise questions about his rights. We spoke to his caseworker, who told us the young man had been informed about his rights when he first arrived at the home and in all their meetings since, as required by law. As a result of our discussion, she created a simple poster that the teen could hang in his room to help him retain and access key information about his rights, the home's complaint process, and contact information for his children's aid society and our Office. The youth confirmed to us that this information sheet was very helpful.

### [Lost in the mail](#)

A woman came to us in frustration after trying several times to obtain her renewed driver's licence. Each time she visited ServiceOntario, she was given a temporary licence and told a permanent one would be mailed to her. But after 6 months and several visits, she still hadn't received it. Our inquiries with the Ministry revealed that it had mailed out several licence cards to the woman, but they had been returned undelivered. They arranged for her to pick up her new licence at ServiceOntario instead.

## [Work with us: Job openings](#)



We continue to hire new staff. Check out all of our open positions in the Careers section of our website.

- [Legal Counsel](#)
- [Early Resolution Officer, Children and Youth Unit](#)
- [Legal Summer Student](#)

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**File a complaint or contact us here**

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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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