

In our April newsletter: The virtual municipal meeting frontier, our work to reach youth in care, new career opportunities and more

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For the past year, municipal councils have been able to hold their meetings electronically, thanks to amendments to the *Municipal Act* prompted by COVID-19 safety concerns.

However, electronic meetings are not without their (technical) difficulties. The Ombudsman has developed a list of best practices to ensure they remain open to the public, as required by law.

Here are a few pointers for municipalities:

- The open meeting rules still apply! All meetings must be open to the public unless they fall within certain exceptions. This means providing clear instructions in the agenda or meeting notice that indicate how the public can access an electronic meeting, such as a link or call-in number.
- Procedures should be amended if you wish to permit public delegations during virtual meetings.
- If the meeting goes into closed session, the resolution to do so must be made in open session and accessible to the public in real time. After the closed session, the general nature of what was discussed should be reported in open session, and also publicly accessible in real time.
- To ensure security of closed meetings, consider providing separate meeting invites or disabling live broadcasting for closed sessions.
- Develop procedures to address technological issues – e.g., if the livestream goes down during an open meeting, effectively making it a closed meeting. Staff should monitor the broadcast to report any issues, and have a backup method of broadcasting in case the first one fails.
- Consider telephone conferencing or other alternatives for members of the public who can't watch a livestream.

The Ombudsman has investigated many complaints about closed electronic meetings in the past year – read his reports [on our website](#) or in our [digital municipal digest](#), or contact us if you have a question or complaint. If you think a meeting in your municipality was closed illegally, find out who your closed meeting investigator is [here](#).

Ombudsman Paul Dubé honoured for excellence in public sector law



Ontario Ombudsman Paul Dubé was named this year's recipient of [the Ontario Bar Association's Tom Marshall Award of Excellence for Public Sector Lawyers](#), honouring his contributions to public sector law in Ontario.

The award, given by the Ontario Bar Association's Public Sector Lawyers Section, will be presented to Ombudsman Dubé at a virtual ceremony at a later date.

"Paul Dubé's work is well known and admired throughout the international ombudsman community," said Peter Tyndall, president of the International Ombudsman Institute and Ombudsman of Ireland. "His commitment to public service values is exemplary and his contribution to improving public services in Ontario is entirely worthy of this recognition."

[Read the press release](#)

[Share and post: How to complain about a lack of services in French](#)

Having problems accessing services in French? Not sure what our Office can do to help? Our new [digital poster](#) provides all the details at a glance for making a complaint to our French Language Services Unit. The 8.5 x 11-inch PDF is easy to download, print and share. If you provide services to the public in French or work with the Franco-Ontarian community, we encourage you to post and share it widely.

This month, printed copies of our [Annual Report of the French Language Services Commissioner, 2019-2020](#), digitally released in December 2020, were mailed out to our stakeholders. If you'd like to receive one, email us at sf-fls@ombudsman.on.ca. We will fill new requests for hard copies of these reports and posters once COVID-19 stay-at-home restrictions permit.



Here, there and (virtually) everywhere



Reaching out to young people

On April 13, staff from the Children and Youth Unit met virtually with 10 youth from Syl Apps Youth Centre – one of three secure treatment facilities in Ontario – to inform them about their rights, and how our Office can help ensure they are respected. Secure treatment programs provide mental health treatment to young people in a locked setting.

After the presentation, our staff followed up with each young person to address their individual questions or concerns, as we always do. For more detailed information about young people's rights in care, check out our downloadable and printable ["Know Your Rights in Care" handout](#).



We continue to provide virtual presentations to youth about their rights and information sessions to service providers about our work. To request a presentation, please [get in touch with us](#).

Sharing experiences with public sector leaders

On April 7, Ombudsman Dubé shared stories from his own public sector leadership journey with participants in the University of Ottawa's Telfer Public Sector Leaders Program. Speaking to more than 25 public sector executives, Mr. Dubé shared personal experiences that shaped his career and life, from being Canada's first federal Taxpayers' Ombudsman to his current role as Ontario's Ombudsman.

Virtual know-how

On April 29, Lauren Chee-Hing of our Legal Services team presented virtually to attendees at the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association's 2021 Conference. She spoke about changes to legislation related to virtual municipal meetings, and suggested best practices for keeping electronic meetings open and accessible.

How we've helped: Case Summaries

Landing test

A woman returning from an overseas trip complained to us that she was not served in French during the COVID-19 test she was required to undergo at Toronto Pearson airport. The test was administered by a third party as part of a pilot-screening project set up by the Ministry of Health and managed by Ontario Health.

After our French Language Services Unit made inquiries, Ontario Health made a commitment to ensure its future agreements include provisions for services in French.



Repairing wrongs

A woman sought our help after her two foster children disclosed to her that their former foster parent had been physically and verbally abusive toward them. She had already reported this to the responsible children's aid society (CAS), but she complained that the CAS had not informed her or the foster children of the outcome of their investigation.

We contacted CAS staff, who confirmed that the youths' disclosures had been verified, and criminal charges were pending against the former foster parent. They agreed they had an obligation to provide this information to the youth to acknowledge they were heard and understood, and they contacted them.

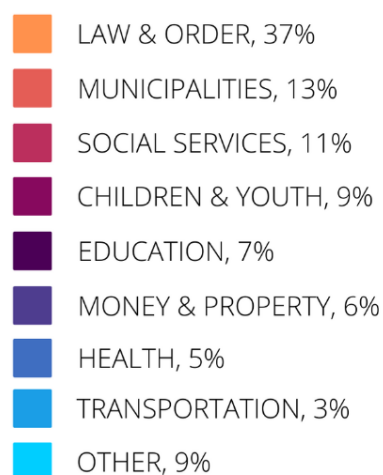


[Visit our website for even more case summaries.](#)

Can we help you with your complaint?

WHAT KINDS OF ISSUES DO WE LOOK AT?

Percentages from the 2019-2020 Annual Report



Learn more at www.ombudsman.on.ca


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We can:

- Help connect you with the appropriate officials.
- Refer you to others who can help, if the matter is not within our jurisdiction.
- Attempt to resolve your problem through communication with the organization(s) involved.
- Determine if an organization's actions or processes were fair.
- Flag trends in complaints to government officials and recommend best practices.
- Assist public sector officials with general questions about our processes.
- Conduct a formal investigation, if the Ombudsman determines it is warranted, and make recommendations for constructive change.

However, we cannot:

- Overturn decisions of elected officials or set public policy.
- Redo the work of other investigative bodies or accountability mechanisms.
- Take complaints about:
 - private companies or individuals
 - judges or court decisions
 - provincial politicians
 - deliberations of provincial cabinet or its committees
 - municipal police or police services boards
 - self-regulating professions (e.g., lawyers, doctors, nurses, teachers)
 - the federal government
 - student associations and student unions
- Investigate complaints within the jurisdiction of other watchdogs, e.g., the [Patient Ombudsman](#), [Ombudsman Toronto](#).

HOW TO SUBMIT A COMPLAINT

1.VISIT OUR WEBSITE

Visit the “Who We Oversee” page on our website. If you’re still not sure if your complaint is something we can look at, contact us.



2.GATHER INFORMATION

What steps have you already tried to resolve the matter? This information will help with our review.



3.FILE YOUR COMPLAINT

You can submit a complaint by using our online form, sending us an email, or leaving us a voicemail.



4.BE READY TO PROVIDE DETAILS

Once you have submitted your complaint, someone from our Early Resolutions team will contact you.



Learn more at www.ombudsman.on.ca



Work with us: Job openings



Interested in working with us?

We continue to hire new staff. Check out all of our open positions in the [Careers](#) section of our website.

- [Early Resolution Officer](#)
- [Communications Officer - Generalist Unit](#)
- [Investigator \(Bilingual\) - French Language Services Unit](#)
- [Articling Student](#)

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 was reappointed for a second five-year term, beginning on April 1, 2021.

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