

In our August newsletter: New municipal video resources for electronic meetings, preparing for Franco-Ontarian Day, MPP outreach and much more

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Municipal matters: The importance of being open – to the public and complaints

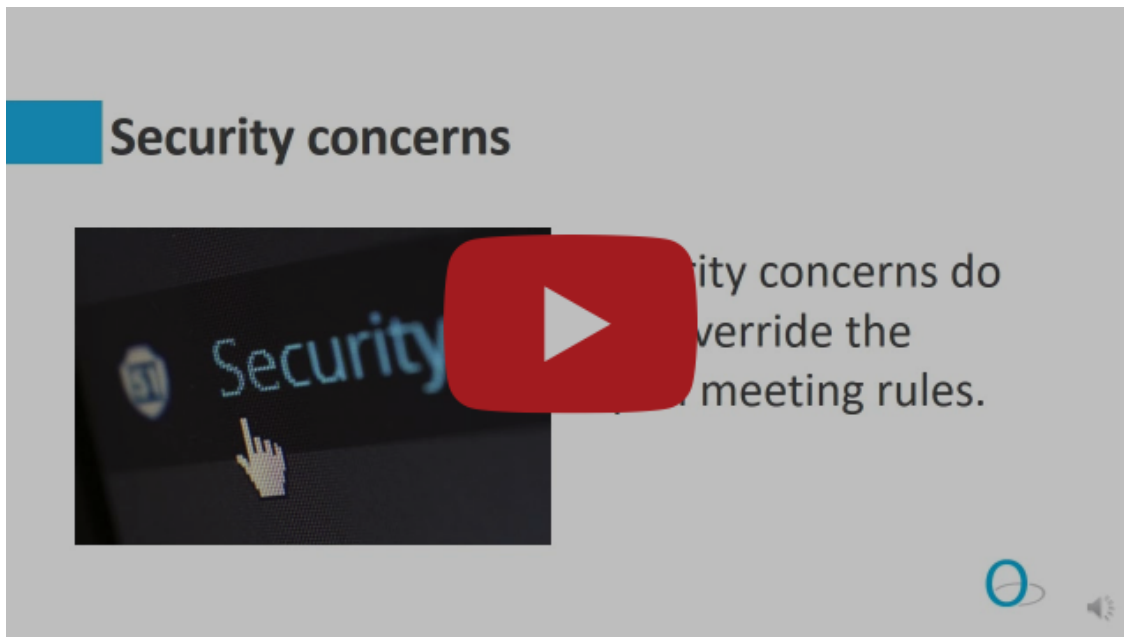


All Ontario municipalities must ensure that their meetings are open to the public, with a few narrow exceptions – and this includes electronic meetings. Anyone who believes a municipality has closed a meeting illegally can make a complaint, and the Ombudsman investigates these complaints in all municipalities except those that have appointed their own investigator.

Our Office also handles general complaints about a wide range of municipal services, including by-law enforcement, housing and infrastructure. Ombudsman Paul Dubé routinely advises municipalities that complaints can provide opportunities to improve governance – and are best resolved locally, through a good complaints process.

This month, we released new video resources for municipal council members and staff to provide general guidance on both issues – best practices for virtual meetings, and how to

develop practical, rigorous complaints processes. These videos debuted as part of the annual conference of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), held August 16-18, where 1,500 delegates were able to view them in the Ideas Marketplace. They are now available to everyone [on our website](#).



In this video, learn tips for ensuring virtual municipal meetings are open and accessible, as well as best practices for successful electronic meetings.



In this video, learn what we recommend to create robust municipal complaint processes.

Local accountability: Ombudsman proposes ways to bolster codes of conduct and

integrity commissioners



As the Ombudsman noted in his latest [Annual Report](#) in June, many of the complaints we receive about municipalities relate to the conduct of municipal council members, and the oversight provided by local integrity commissioners. We have suggested numerous tips and best practices for integrity commissioners and local codes of conduct – and this month, the Ombudsman expanded on these in his submission to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing’s public consultation on strengthening accountability for municipal council members.

Ombudsman Dubé identified three key changes to the rules for codes of conduct and integrity commissioners that would strengthen local accountability mechanisms. He called on the province to:

1. Mandate and standardize protocols for integrity commissioners.
2. Standardize and expand requirements for codes of conduct.
3. Mandate accreditation and training for integrity commissioners.

[Read the Ombudsman’s full submission.](#)

Cautioning against CAS-initiated calls to police



The [Children and Youth section](#) of the Ombudsman's [2020-2021 Annual Report](#) identified a trend where children's aid societies (CASs) had resorted to calling police to deal with young people in their care. In one case, a youth had left her foster home without permission and returned to her family home, at which point police handcuffed and removed her; in another, there was a recommendation for a group home to call in the police to caution a young person about his behaviour.

Our Office intervened in many of these disturbing cases, noting that the criminal justice system should not be used as a substitute for child protection, mental health or other social measures. Our intervention prompted some CASs to review when and how they involve police with young people in their care. You can learn more about how we helped in these instances on the [Case Summaries](#) section of our website.

Do you have a concern about the way a young person may have been treated by their service provider, or about calls to police initiated by a CAS, group home or foster home? We can take complaints from young people, adults and care providers. Contact us via [phone](#), [email](#) or on [our website](#).

[Preparing to celebrate Franco-Ontarian Day](#)



September is almost upon us and the Franco-Ontarian community is getting ready for celebrations that will culminate with flag-raising ceremonies across the province to celebrate Franco-Ontarian Day on September 25.

French Language Services Commissioner Kelly Burke will be participating in Franco-Ontarian recognition events. Stay connected with updates from our social media accounts and watch this space next month for a recap.

[Reaching out to MPPs](#)



In response to enquiries about the nature of our work in her riding, senior Ombudsman staff spoke virtually to staff from the offices of London-Fanshawe MPP Teresa Armstrong on August 17. We welcome opportunities to highlight the process for MPPs to refer constituents' concerns and issues to our Office, and explain how we resolve and escalate complaints about a broad range of provincial programs, agencies and services, including French language services.

We also provided general details about the types of complaints we received from the riding. We [report annually on riding case statistics in our Annual Report](#), and, upon request, can provide MPPs with general information about the types of cases we've dealt with in their constituency.

Attention MPPs: If you would like more details about cases in your riding, [please contact us](#).

Here, there and (virtually) everywhere



Meeting with those over-represented in the child welfare system: Racialized youth

Over the last month, staff from our Children and Youth Unit started an ongoing series of meetings with 160 youth at foster homes across the Greater Toronto Area as part of our Office's outreach to reach racialized children and youth in care. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the [Ontario Association for Children's Aid Societies](#), racialized young people – particularly Black children and youth – are [over-represented in the child welfare system](#).

These meetings, which all took place virtually, were aimed at introducing young people to our Office, explaining why children and youth may want to contact us, and discussing the rights of young people in care. With the further easing of COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions, we hope to return to in-person meetings and presentations with youth in care in the near future.

We continue to welcome requests to provide virtual presentations to service providers and youth about our Office. Please [contact us](#) for more information.

How we helped: Case summaries



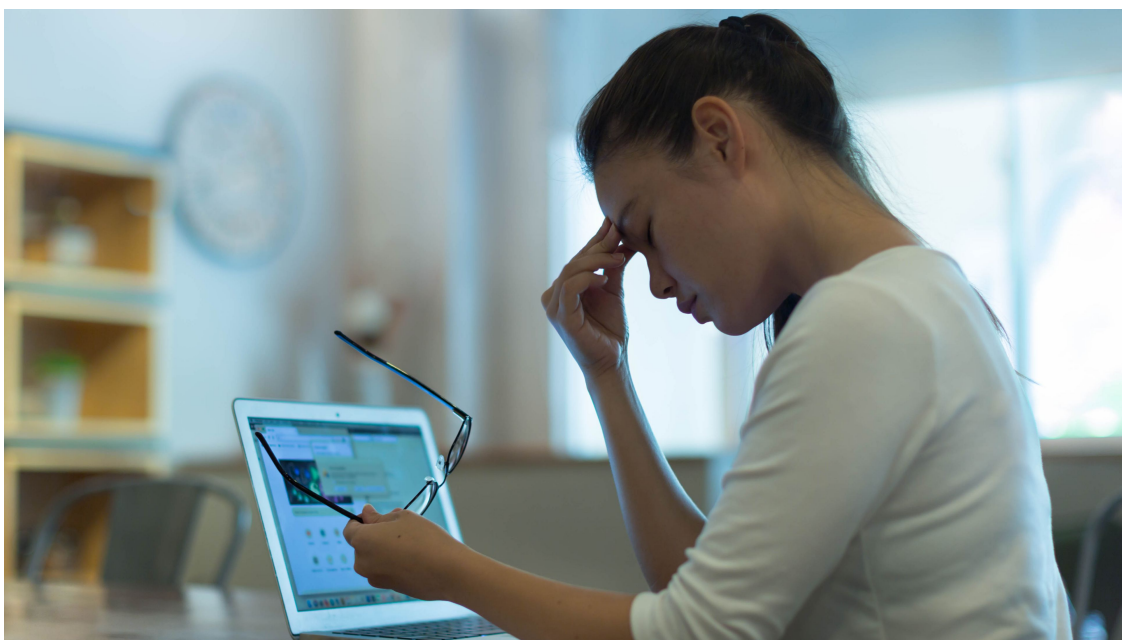
Dogged determination

After a youth living in a treatment home complained that his request for a service dog was refused, we followed up with his CAS worker. She raised the issue with the home, which agreed to develop a new policy regarding service dogs, which they provided to us. She also arranged for a puppy to be trained as a service dog for the youth.



The right words

A Francophone education professional complained to us about the inadequate quality of French on some of the forms for the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP), a school-to-work transition program offered in high schools across the province. We raised the issue with the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development. As a result of our intervention, the Ministry improved its translation and review process and hired more bilingual staff, including a bilingual manager.



After-life support

An unemployed woman who had been paying child support to her children's father complained to us that the Family Responsibility Office (FRO) was still intercepting 50% of her unemployment benefits, even though the man had died and the children were now in her care. Our staff flagged the case as urgent to FRO officials, who immediately lifted the garnishment of her benefits and returned \$1,100 to the woman.

[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 Resolutions Officer](#)

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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