

In our February newsletter: Reaching students at provincial and demonstration schools, PEI appoints first Ombudsperson, new videos about services in French, and more

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HELPING STUDENTS WHERE THEY LIVE: OMBUDSMAN STAFF REACH OUT TO PROVINCIAL AND DEMONSTRATION SCHOOLS



To ensure the concerns of children and youth in residential care settings are being heard during the pandemic, the Ombudsman's Children and Youth Unit regularly meets with them – in fact, we've done more than 40 virtual presentations with group homes and other residential licencees since April 2021.

Ontario also has nine provincial and demonstration schools that include residences and provide intensive programming for children who are deaf, blind/low vision, deafblind, or have severe learning disabilities. On February 3 and 16, we presented virtually to Ontario's only such school for Francophone children – the [Centre Jules-Léger Provincial and Demonstration School](#) in Ottawa.

Deputy Ombudsman Barbara Finlay and Children and Youth Director Diana Cooke accompanied Emmanuelle Bleytou, our Communications Manager for Children and Youth and French Language Services, for the two presentations, which were attended by a total of about 60 students and 20 staff.

The youth-friendly presentation, in French, was tailored to students with accessibility needs, and delivered in LSQ (Langue des signes du Québec) with the help of the provincial school's interpreters.

Students received information about their specific rights – for example, how they can seek help from our Office if they are experiencing a problem at the school or residence, or if they feel their needs are not being met. We also discussed our Office's broader role in assisting individuals and families who may have questions or concerns about other provincial services, such health care, social services or French language services.

Questions from students and staff ranged from where to turn with meal-related concerns to whether an adult can complain to the Ombudsman on behalf of a young person. We explained how we work with everyone involved to resolve issues wherever possible, and how we follow up with young people to ensure their concerns are heard.

We plan to offer our presentation to all provincial and demonstration schools across the province this year.

To learn more about our Children and Youth Unit or to request a presentation for your organization, please visit our [Children and Youth Unit page](#).

Do you have questions, concerns or a complaint about a provincial or demonstration school? Contact us at 1-800-263-1830 or email info@ombudsman.on.ca.

[PEI APPOINTS FIRST OMBUDSPERSON](#)



Prince Edward Island is Canada's smallest province and – until this month – the last one without an independent ombudsman. Sandy Hermiston officially started in her role as PEI's first Ombudsperson and Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner on February 14, and PEI now joins nine provinces and two territories in helping uphold the rights of residents in accessing public services.

Ontario Ombudsman Paul Dubé welcomed the news. "This is a great achievement for Prince Edward Island," he said. "With an independent Ombudsperson, Islanders now have an effective and accessible tool to tackle their issues with government and promote transparency in the public sector. I am confident Ms. Hermiston will be an agent of positive change for PEI."

In a [news release](#) published by the Canadian Council of Parliamentary Ombudsman, Hermiston said: "Parliamentary ombudsman offices have played an increasingly important role in ensuring standards of fairness in government translate through to Canadians accessing public services. I'm looking forward to being of service in PEI, to support collaborative resolution of complaints and to instill public confidence in the administration of government."

Hermiston's office will field complaints from the public and also offer government employees a confidential way to raise concerns without fear of reprisal. Every Canadian province and territory except Nunavut now has a parliamentary ombudsman.

Prior to taking on the role as PEI's Ombudsperson, Ms. Hermiston served as the Cayman Islands' first ombudsman and as general counsel with the Alberta ombudsman.

Do you have a question about how an Ombudsman works, or what happens when

you submit a complaint? The [Frequently Asked Questions](#) page on our website answers the most common inquiries we receive. Or, you can [contact us](#) if you have a question or concern.

FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES: NEW CASE VIDEOS



Last month, this newsletter introduced a new video featuring the French Language Services Commissioner's Compass. This tool, presented in Commissioner Kelly Burke's latest Annual Report, is designed to help the government plan and evaluate the provision of French language services, using four criteria – Fairness, Logistics, Satisfaction and Communication.

This month, don't miss our two new videos demonstrating the FLSC Compass in action, based on real complaints we received:

[Case 1: No protection for French](#)

[Case 2: Linguistic isolation](#)

HERE, THERE AND (VIRTUALLY) EVERYWHERE

Black History Month



Marking Black History Month, French Language Services Commissioner Kelly Burke took part in the virtual celebration gala organized by the Centre francophone du Grand Toronto on February 26. In her video greeting to participants, she stated: “The Francophone community of Ontario in all its expressions is at the centre of the work I do to ensure the protection of language rights. All Francophones in Ontario must hear and recognize themselves in our public institutions. I contribute to this by protecting access to services in French so that these are communicated, available, equivalent and that the experience of all Francophones who need government services in French is positive.”

Keeping French language services at the forefront



On February 24, Commissioner Burke spoke to [Parents partenaires en éducation](#) (PPE), an organization for parents with children in French public and Catholic schools in Ontario, at an event open to families guardians, caregivers, and the Francophone community in general. The Commissioner spoke about the Ombudsman's role and the work of our French Language Services Unit, as well as her recent Annual Report. Video of the session can be found on [PPE's YouTube page](#).

As part of her work in proactively flagging issues to public officials to improve the offer of services in French, Commissioner Burke made a presentation to the Provincial Advisory Committee on Francophone Affairs on February 2. Attending this committee's meetings ensures information relevant to our work is shared with the government and that there is ongoing collaboration on current issues.

Next month is Francophonie month – watch for our March newsletter to learn how we participated in this celebration of Ontario's Francophonie!

Essential teachings for ombuds



On February 9, Deputy Ombudsman Barbara Finlay presented virtually at the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman's "Essentials for Ombuds" course, a five-day intensive training collaboration between the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman and Osgoode Professional Development.

Ms. Finlay and co-presenter Beth George, Senior Investigator at the Alberta Ombudsman, discussed how and when to launch a systemic investigation, best practices for witness interviewing and evidence gathering, and how to make impactful recommendations to improve public services.

HOW WE HELPED – CASE SUMMARIES



[Refusal reversed](#)

A 16-year-old youth complained to us that her children's aid society (CAS) had refused to allow her to enter into a Voluntary Youth Services Agreement (VYSA) after she had left her home due to the abusive behaviour of her aunt. VYSAs are offered to 16- and 17-year-olds who have left home because of concerns about their safety.

CAS officials initially told us they were unable to verify that the youth's aunt was abusive. As we looked into the situation further, we discovered that her younger brothers had been removed from the home out of concerns for their safety. We asked the CAS to review the girl's allegations about her aunt again, and based on their review, the CAS agreed to offer her a VYSA.

[All young people in care have rights](#), including the right to have service providers respond to complaints and help them try to resolve it. If a young person feels their rights aren't being met or respected, they have [a right to make a complaint to us](#).

[Click here to learn more about how we helped with issues or problems concerning children and youth](#)



[Cured by translation](#)

We were contacted by a person who visited the Ontario Health Data Platform website to learn more about a Ministry of Health research project – only to discover the site was only available in English.

We raised the issue with the Ministry, which explained that the site and the platform were not for the general public and were run by a consortium that did not meet the definition of a government agency, and was not a third party of the Ministry of Health.

However, the Ministry has since translated the information deemed relevant to the public and now offers services in French to researchers regarding the application process for accessing the platform.

Learn more about the [French Language Services Unit](#) which answers questions and takes complaints about services in French.

[Click here to learn more about how we helped with issues or problems concerning French language services](#)



[Kept in suspense](#)

A driver whose licence was suspended as a result of a criminal charge successfully appealed the charge and had it removed from his record. He was told by ServiceOntario staff that the licence would be reinstated within 2-3 days. He complained to us when, several weeks later, he was charged with driving with a suspended licence and his car was impounded. Our inquiries with the Ministry revealed that the timeframe for processing licence reinstatements in these situations is actually 15 business days.

However, this timeframe was not communicated to the public or even ServiceOntario and court staff who deal with public inquiries. After we raised this with the Ministry, it added information about the processing timeframe to its website and advised ServiceOntario and court staff. We also suggested that the Ministry's notices to drivers include information about its free online service for checking the status of their licence. The Ministry agreed to reimburse the man for half of the costs he incurred when his car was impounded.

[Click here to learn more about how we helped Ontarians with their problems](#)

[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.

- [Early Resolution Officer](#)
- [Early Resolution Officer \(French Language Services Unit\)](#)
- [Early Resolution Officer \(Children and Youth Unit\)](#)
- [Legal Counsel \(French Language Services\)](#)

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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