

In our March newsletter: French Language Services Commissioner's report on cuts to French-language programs at Laurentian University, celebrating International Francophonie Day, sharing expertise with global colleagues, and more

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Laurentian University and province failed to protect French programs from cuts during restructuring, Commissioner reports

Celebrating International Francophonie Day

French language services: More case videos

Children and youth in care: Make the most of our Office's support

How a strong Ombudsman is good for democracy

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Spread the word: We're hiring

LAURENTIAN UNIVERSITY AND PROVINCE FAILED TO PROTECT FRENCH PROGRAMS FROM CUTS DURING RESTRUCTURING, COMMISSIONER REPORTS



Laurentian University, the Ministry of Francophone Affairs and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities neglected their obligations under the *French Language Services Act* during the university's financial restructuring process, French Language Services Commissioner Kelly Burke found in her latest investigation.

"The nearly 50% cuts to French-language programs announced on April 12, 2021 by Laurentian University have had a significant and detrimental impact on the university's delivery of French-language services," Commissioner Burke says in her report, [*Strengthening the Designation: A Collaborative Effort*](#), released on March 31. She also

found that the ministries failed to fulfil their own obligations to ensure French services at the university were protected.

The investigation revealed a lack of leadership in the administration of the *French Language Services Act (FLSA)*. The university did not consult with the two ministries to discuss the impact of its decisions on its obligations under the *FLSA* before suspending and cutting programs. "Laurentian University and the ministries must take responsibility and work together to comply with the Act," the Commissioner stated.

Her report makes 19 recommendations to fix communication gaps, improve planning and ensure such a situation does not happen again. The ministries and the university accepted all of the recommendations and pledged to report back to the Commissioner on their progress in implementing them.

The Commissioner stressed that her recommendations are aimed at preventing similar situations in the future: "I am confident that my recommendations will benefit French-speaking Ontarians in the future in the post-secondary education sector."

[Read the full report and the Commissioner's remarks](#)

In the News

- [Laurentian program cuts violated French Language Services Act, commissioner finds](#) - Sudbury.com
- [Laurentian University violated French Language Services Act when it cut programs: report](#) - CBC

CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL FRANCOPHONIE DAY



[Read Commissioner Kelly Burke's statement](#)

Francophones and Francophiles celebrated International Francophonie Day on March 20, a day to celebrate and promote French language and culture.

To mark the occasion, French Language Services Commissioner Kelly Burke issued a statement noting that Ontario is “a beacon for the Canadian Francophonie outside Quebec,” and as such, “must lead by example in protecting language rights.”

She also reiterated her recent recommendation that the government self-evaluate its delivery of services in French, and ensure those evaluations lead to improvements by monitoring its performance, using measurable objectives and tools to achieve them.

[FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES: MORE CASE VIDEOS](#)



Last month, this newsletter featured our first two videos demonstrating the French Language Services Commissioner's Compass in action. The FLSC Compass is a method designed to help the government plan and evaluate the provision of French language services, using four criteria – Fairness, Logistics, Satisfaction and Communication.

This month, check out the last two videos of our series, illustrating two more cases we resolved for Franco-Ontarians.

[Case 3: Document not found](#)

[Case 4: From injury to insult](#)

CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE: MAKE THE MOST OF OUR OFFICE'S SUPPORT



Did you know? The Ombudsman's Children and Youth Unit website has a [Frequently Asked Questions](#) (FAQs) page for children and youth, as well as [Resources](#) for both young people and service providers in the child welfare system!

[We answer questions](#) about how we can help people through our work, such as:

- What are my rights as a child or youth in care? (It's our job to promote and protect these rights, while looking out for problems.)
- Is the Ombudsman my advocate? Will you take my side?
- What can I expect when I contact you, and what will change for me if I make a complaint?
- What does it cost to make a complaint? (Answer: Nothing! Our services are free)

Our [Resources page](#) contains other important information, such as [guidance on the obligations of service providers](#) under Ontario's *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017*; information on young people's rights in care; and handouts (such as [posters](#) and [wallet cards](#)) displaying what we do, and how people can contact us.

If you can't find your questions there or have other concerns, you can always contact us via:

- Our website: <https://bit.ly/ChildrenAndYouthUnit>
- Email: cy-ej@ombudsman.on.ca
- Phone: 1-800-263-2841 or 416-325-5669
- Social media ([Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#))

WEBINAR: HOW A STRONG OMBUDSMAN INSTITUTION IS GOOD FOR DEMOCRACY



On March 29, Ombudsman Paul Dubé, who is also the North America Regional President of the International Ombudsman Institute, hosted a webinar aimed at helping ombudsman offices enhance their mandates and strengthen the legislative foundations of their offices.

The webinar, titled “Leveraging the Venice Principles and UN Resolution on the Role of Ombudsman to promote and protect Ombudsman organizations,” welcomed participants from more than 30 countries, including Belgium, Ireland, Romania, Madagascar, the Netherlands, Japan and Australia. It focused on how ombuds can use these internationally recognized standards to better define, promote and protect their role in strengthening democracy and promoting human rights – and to shore up the resources of their offices to continue their crucial work.

Alongside Ombudsman Dubé, Rafael Ribó, the acting Ombudsman of the Catalan regions of Spain, offered a brief presentation about his experience using the Venice Principles to protect and strengthen his office.

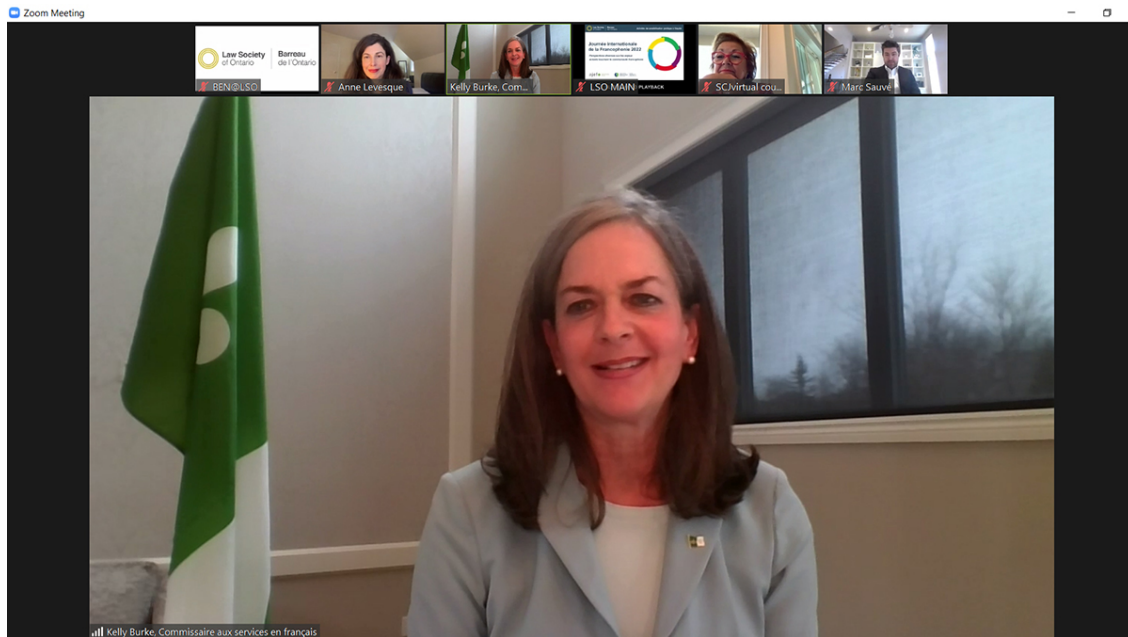
They also explained how these declarations and advocacy tools can be used to help ombuds inform parliaments, legislative assemblies and governing bodies and, ultimately, advocate for change.

[Read more about the Venice Principles](#), which set out the legal principles essential to the establishment of independent and impartial ombudsman institutions.

[Read more about the United Nations Resolution on the Role of the Ombudsman](#), which provides strong endorsement of the Venice Principles and establishes these principles as the new global standard for the ombudsmen institutions.

To learn more about the Ombudsman and how we resolve complaints about Ontario government and public sector bodies, please visit our [How We Work](#) information page.

[HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE](#)



Francophonie Month events

On March 1, Commissioner Burke delivered the opening remarks of a virtual training session organized by the French Language Institute for Professional Development for professionals in the justice sector.

On March 21, the Commissioner was a panelist at an International Francophonie Day event organized by the Law Society of Ontario, the Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Ontario, and the Ontario Bar Association. The panel, attended online by a record number of people, discussed the newly introduced changes to modernize the federal *Official Languages Act*, and Commissioner Burke elaborated on issues faced by Francophones in accessing justice in French in Ontario.

On March 25, French-language health services planning entity Entité 3 hosted a French health services Forum, at which Commissioner Burke gave a video address. She discussed the highlights of her recent Annual Report, including her recommendation for government to plan ahead and use the FLSC Compass to evaluate the delivery of services in French.



Using technology to effectively handle complaints

On March 8, Deputy Ombudsman Barbara Finlay presented virtually to more than 280 attendees from around the world at a webinar on complaint handling hosted by the University of Kwazulu-Natal and the African Ombudsman Research Centre (AORC), both located in Durban, South Africa. The event was organized by the AORC for ombuds and other complaint-driven bodies to discuss best practices for complaint handling.

Deputy Ombudsman Finlay shared how our Office uses technology and various social media strategies to announce investigations, receive complaints, monitor and proactively flag complaint trends, and analyze statistics, providing real examples of case studies and investigations. You can [watch the webinar here](#).



The six-minute Ombudsman

Ombudsman Paul Dubé raced the clock at the Law Society of Ontario's "Six-Minute Lawyer" event on March 1. Presenting online to more than 200 administrative law professionals, the Ombudsman focused on our Office's work with administrative tribunals and how we help lawyers, paralegals, legal clinics and other advocates resolve their clients' questions or complaints about provincial government and public sector services. [Learn more about our work with administrative tribunals.](#)

Livestreaming electronic and hybrid meetings

- Livestreaming electronic meetings satisfies the open meeting requirements of the Act
- The method matters – it should be reliable and accessible to the public
- **Remember:** All portions of an open meeting must be accessible to the public!



Meeting, electronically

Senior Counsel Robin Bates and Joanna Bull shared insights and best practices for keeping virtual meetings open and accessible to the public at the Northern CAO and Clerks' Forum hosted by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing on March 24. Northern municipalities face unique challenges when it comes to streaming meetings online, since not all communities are served by broadband internet.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, our Office has worked with municipalities to help them find feasible ways to keep meetings open to the public when in-person attendance is not possible. [Watch our video on the subject.](#)

HOW WE HELPED – CASE SUMMARIES



[A helping hand](#)

A youth sought our help with retrieving belongings she had left behind at her family home after experiencing physical abuse at the hands of her stepfather.

She told us that she didn't feel safe returning there without the support of her Children's Aid Society worker, but she complained that her worker wasn't prioritizing getting her belongings back. She added she had to borrow a school uniform and did not have access to her homework.

We spoke with the youth's worker, who committed to accompanying the youth to her former home at a specified time and date. We later followed up with the youth, who told us she was able to retrieve her possessions and felt relieved.

Our Children and Youth Unit staff will listen, review concerns about the experiences and services provided to young people by the child welfare system, and help find solutions. If we can't help directly, we will refer you to someone who can. [Contact us](#).

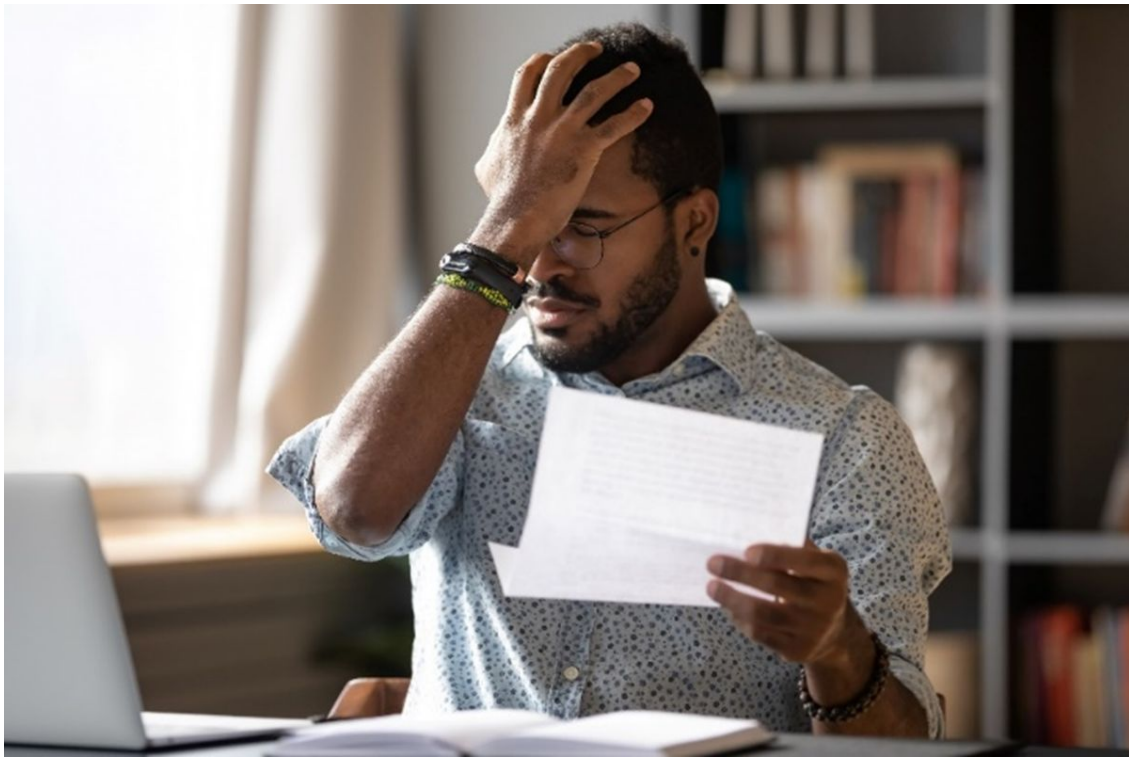
Click here to learn more about how we helped with issues or problems concerning children and youth



In French please, Your Honour

We were contacted by a person who requested a bilingual hearing at a courthouse in Northern Ontario. However, at the time of the hearing, the judge present could only speak English and no other means of providing services in French were available. The self-represented person could not follow the hearing adequately or participate in it in French, so the judge decided to suspend the hearing. We raised the case with the Ministry of the Attorney General, and were told this was a scheduling error. As a result of our intervention, the Ministry reminded courthouse staff of the procedure for scheduling a bilingual hearing, to ensure services are available and equivalent at all times.

Learn more about the French Language Services Unit which answers questions and takes complaints about services in French.



[Slow off the marks](#)

A college graduate seeking to pursue studies at a university sought our help when he was unable to provide official transcripts from the college, whose offices were closed in spring 2020 due to COVID-19. He complained that the college did not respond to his inquiries until June, and did not provide his unofficial transcript until October, which was too late for the university's fall semester. College officials acknowledged that changes to its processes due to the pandemic had resulted in issues that they had since addressed. They offered to apologize to the graduate and explain the situation to his new university, where he successfully enrolled for the next semester.

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

[SPREAD THE WORD: WE'RE HIRING](#)



Throughout March, Ombudsman staff attended virtual career fairs hosted by the faculties of law at McGill University, the University of Ottawa, and the University of Windsor. We shared information about how our staff work collaboratively to resolve complaints about Ontario government and public sector organizations, as well as investigate large-scale issues impacting millions of Ontarians.

"It was great to learn more about your position in the Office of the Ombudsman," one student told us. "I only get more excited about the Office as I learn more about your work!"

Read more about some of our current opportunities here.

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

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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