

April newsletter: Ombudsman calls for transparency, consultation in planning youth custody and detention closures, and more

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OMBUDSMAN CALLS FOR TRANSPARENCY, CONSULTATION IN PLANNING YOUTH CUSTODY AND DETENTION CLOSURES



Government officials' overreliance on secrecy in planning the abrupt closure of two youth custody and detention programs in Northern Ontario last year came at a price, Ombudsman Paul Dubé says in his latest report, released on April 26.

The secure custody and detention programs at the Creighton Youth Centre in Kenora and J.J. Kelso Youth Centre in Thunder Bay were among 25 programs simultaneously shut down on March 1, 2021 in an operation that the Ombudsman found was "shrouded in secrecy."

The two programs housed four youths at the time, all Indigenous. The Ombudsman launched an investigation after receiving a complaint that expressed numerous concerns about the treatment of these young people, some of whom were transported in handcuffs and shackles and moved far from their communities with only a few hours' notice.

The Ombudsman's report, *Lost Opportunities*, concludes that the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services "deliberately avoided transparency" in planning and implementing the closures, which came as a surprise even to managers and staff at the affected centres, as well as the surrounding communities, Indigenous groups and justice officials. Deeming the Ministry's conduct "unreasonable and wrong" under the *Ombudsman Act*, Mr. Dubé makes 16 recommendations in the report to improve the planning and implementation of such closures in future, all of which the Ministry has accepted.

[Read the full report](#)

In the News

- [Ontario's 'secrecy' when closing youth jails hurt Indigenous teens, ombud finds](#) - Toronto Star
- [Ontario ombudsman's report details flawed closures of youth justice programs in northwest](#) - CBC
- [Ombudsmen report details failures by province in handling closure of youth detention facilities](#) - TBNewsWatch.com
- [Provincial ombudsman calls sudden closure of three NWO youth detention facilities "unreasonable and wrong"](#) - CBC Superior Morning (audio)

STANDING IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE 2SLGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY



On April 13, 2022, Ombudsman Ontario recognized the International Day of Pink on social media, standing in solidarity with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, while encouraging inclusivity, equality and acceptance – values and principles which are integral to our Office. As our Facebook post noted, “we encourage all Ontarians to stand for inclusivity equality, and acceptance. Our interactions with those who contact our Office are built on these principles.”

The [stated vision](#) of our Office is “a public sector that serves citizens in a way that is fair, accountable, transparent and respectful of their rights.”

STAYING OPEN: MUNICIPAL MEETINGS



Off-road vehicle routes and recruitment of chief administrative officers were among the subjects of some of our Office's latest investigations of closed municipal meetings.

The Ombudsman is the closed meeting investigator for hundreds of Ontario municipalities and helps local councils ensure their meetings remain open and accessible to the public as required by the *Municipal Act, 2001*.

Our investigations revealed several meetings were problematic, and the Ombudsman made recommendations to the municipalities to improve their practices. For example:

- The [Off Road Vehicle Task Force in the City of Kawartha Lakes](#) contravened the *Municipal Act* because it held working group meetings without notifying the public. As a committee of council, the task force was subject to the open meeting rules.
- The Ombudsman found that a discussion held *in camera* by the [City of Niagara Falls](#) about establishing a CAO recruitment sub-committee should have occurred in open session because it focused on the nature and role of a proposed staff position, not on a specific employee.
- Council for the [Township of McMurrich/Monteith](#) should have discussed a road dispute in open session before moving into closed session to speak privately about the township's response to potential litigation, the Ombudsman found.

Read more reports and the Ombudsman's recommended best practices for open meetings on our [municipalities webpage](#) or browse by topic in our [digest of open meetings cases](#).

If you think a meeting in your municipality was closed improperly, [find your closed meeting investigator](#)

[HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE](#)



Supporting Francophone education

On April 23, French Language Services Commissioner Kelly Burke delivered a [video message](#) (in French only) during the Annual Parents' Conference hosted by [Parents partenaires en éducation](#), an organization representing parents with children in Ontario's public and Catholic French-language schools. In her remarks, Commissioner Burke spoke of the importance of creating an environment where Francophones feel comfortable accessing government services in French. She reiterated her recommendations from her [2022-2021 Annual Report](#) and her recent [investigation into Laurentian University's cuts to French-language programming](#), and encouraged all those who have trouble accessing services in French to [contact us](#).

The virtual gathering addressed the themes of diversity and inclusion, and was well attended by parents and members of Ontario's Francophone community.



Join us on May 25 for Toronto Newcomer Day!

On May 25 at Nathan Phillips Square in downtown Toronto, you can catch Ontario Ombudsman staff at the 8th annual Toronto Newcomer Day! Stop by our booth from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. for interactive activities, information and resources about our Office, and meet some of our friendly staff. The event is free and open to everyone! [Learn more about the event](#). #TONewcomerDay

HOW WE HELPED – CASE SUMMARIES



ID help

A 14-year-old youth needed our help getting identification documents to register for school and access health care, after he was removed from his home by a children's aid society (CAS) over safety concerns.

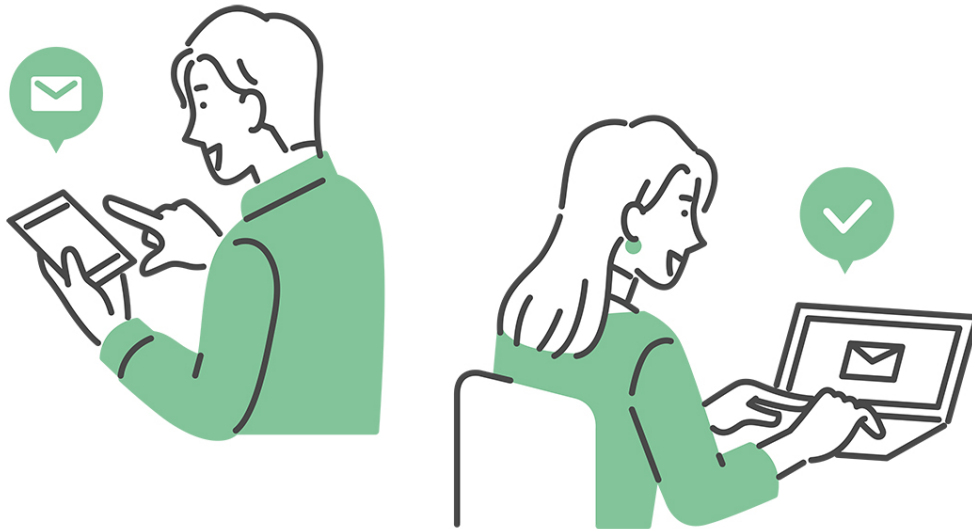
The youth looked to his CAS worker for support when he was unable to get his identification documents from his mother. But when he didn't hear back from his worker in more than two weeks, he contacted our Office.

We spoke to the youth's worker, who said he would have to write an "advocacy letter" on the youth's behalf, then take him to a nearby ServiceOntario location to obtain the ID. We asked him to schedule this, which he did, and the youth received his new temporary ID documents within three days.

Our Children and Youth Unit staff will listen, answer questions, review concerns about the

experiences and services provided to young people in 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



[Transit news: Now bilingual!](#)

A resident who wanted to subscribe to a Durham Region newsletter from Metrolinx was disappointed to learn that it wasn't available in French.

We informed Metrolinx representatives of the fact that the newsletter did not exist in French. Due to our intervention, they confirmed that all regional newsletters published by Metrolinx would be translated going forward – including the newsletter for Durham Region, which was available in French as of March 11.

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



[Bad form](#)

A father whose child was born through a surrogate mother complained to us after the Registrar General asked him to resubmit the paperwork for registering the birth, and include an additional form swearing that his statements were true. He complained that this additional requirement was discriminatory towards him. Our staff determined that in fact, the form was sent to him in error and was unrelated to the surrogacy, and a Registrar General manager confirmed that this was clarified with the responsible staff.

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

SPREAD THE WORD: WE'RE HIRING



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

- [Articling Student \(2023-2024\)](#)
- [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.

The Ontario Ombudsman's work takes place on traditional Indigenous territories across the province we now call Ontario, and we are thankful to be able to work and live on this land.

What does the Ombudsman do during a provincial election?

The provincial election is June 2, and throughout the campaign period, while the Ombudsman and other non-partisan, independent officers of the legislature remain on the job, we keep a deliberately low profile. We are receiving and reviewing complaints as usual, and our ongoing investigations continue. However, we bear in mind that the Ontario public service is in a “caretaker” role during an election period, and major policy changes are unlikely. We also have no major report releases scheduled until after the election.

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