

December newsletter: New investigation – Ombudsman to investigate direct education payment programs, French Language Services 2022-2023 Annual Report, and more

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New investigation: Ombudsman to investigate direct education payment programs

French Language Services Annual Report: New Commissioner reports robust results for Francophones and 40% increase in cases

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See you next year!

New investigation: Ombudsman to investigate direct education payment programs



On December 11, Ontario Ombudsman Paul Dubé announced a new systemic investigation into the Ministry of Education’s direct payment programs for parents and students, due to concerns about a lack of fairness and transparency.

The programs sparked complaints from parents who were denied payments for the children in their custody because someone else had claimed the money first. “We heard disturbing accounts from parents who were not only denied funding for the children in their care – they were not told who received the payments,” said Ombudsman Dubé.

The Ministry has administered six such programs since 2020 – the most recent being “Catch Up Payments” in 2022-2023.

“People have complained to us about this issue through successive iterations of these programs, and the latest version is likely not the last,” the Ombudsman said. “Our investigation will look for the root of the problem and recommend ways to make these programs fair and transparent going forward.”

Anyone who has experienced a similar problem is invited to contact the Ombudsman. [Complaints and inquiries can be submitted here.](#)

READ THE FULL INVESTIGATION ANNOUNCEMENT

In the News:

- [Ontario ombudsman to probe Ministry of Education payments to students, parents](#) (Toronto Star)
- [Ontario ombudsman launches investigation into province's payouts to parents](#) (CBC News)
- [Ontario ombudsman to investigate education payments to parents](#) (Global News)

[French Language Services Annual Report: New Commissioner reports robust results for Francophones and 40% increase in cases](#)



On December 7, French Language Services Commissioner Carl Bouchard released his 2022-2023 Annual Report, calling on Ontario government ministries and agencies to train all frontline staff on how and why they are required to provide services in French.

Mr. Bouchard was appointed Commissioner by Ontario Ombudsman Paul Dubé on December 4, after serving as Interim Commissioner for the past nine months and Director of Operations of the French Language Services Unit since February 2020.

The Commissioner’s report reviewed the 386 cases received by the French Language Services Unit between October 1, 2022 and September 30, 2023. This represents a 40%

increase in complaints and inquiries over the same period last year.

“This report is full of examples showing how the application of the Ombudsman approach to resolving complaints has made it possible to improve services in French and effectively promote language rights in Ontario,” said the Commissioner. “I am committed to staying connected with Francophones to ensure that calling our Office becomes a reflex for them whenever they find their language rights are not respected,”

The Commissioner makes four new recommendations to improve French language services, and notes that all 30 recommendations made by the Office to date have been accepted by the government. [Read the Commissioner's recommendations here.](#)

[Read the Commissioner's report highlights](#) / [Read the Commissioner's remarks](#)

READ THE FULL REPORT

In the News:

- [French language services commissioner receives highest level of complaints and inquiries since 2019](#) (The Trillium)
- [La santé en français, parfois une question de vie ou de mort](#) (ONFR) - in French only
- [Le nombre de plaintes auprès du Commissaire aux services en français bondit](#) (Le Devoir) - in French only
- [Le français dans certains examens professionnels laisse à désirer en Ontario](#) (Le Droit) - in French only

Here, there and everywhere

Empowering youth: Insightful sessions on understanding rights in care

On December 4, our Children and Youth Unit staff spoke to young people aged 6-12 during a session at York Hills Centre for Children, Youth and Families, about rights in care, and about how to contact our Office with concerns or questions.

On December 7, Children and Youth Unit Director Diana Cooke and Early Resolutions Manager Eileen Laffey spoke to social work students at Western University about the roles and responsibilities of our Office and our commitment to upholding and promoting the rights of children and youth in care.

Inspired by tomorrow's leaders: Meeting the National Assembly of Québec interns



On December 12, Ombudsman Paul Dubé, Deputy Ombudsman Barbara Finlay, and French Language Services Commissioner Carl Bouchard spoke to the 2023-2024 interns from the National Assembly of Québec. They discussed the roles of the Ombudsman and Commissioner in promoting fairness and accountability in Ontario's public sector bodies, and how complaints from the public help our Office propose solutions to improve and strengthen governance.

Protecting Ontario together

In the same month that Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health warned of increasing levels of both flu and COVID-19 across the province, our Office held a friendly competition and info sessions with our occupational health nurse to promote the benefits of vaccination against both viruses. By mid-month, our organization was 44% vaccinated against the flu.

How we helped: Case summaries



Returning French to the French River

A Francophone resident from the Sudbury area informed us about an English-only sign marking the French River on Highway 69, located between Parry Sound and Sudbury. We brought this issue to the attention of the Ministry of Transportation.

As a result of our intervention, the Ministry installed a new bilingual sign that reads “Rivière des Français/French River.” The Francophone thanked and commended us for our work.

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



Moving on

A 15-year-old living in a group home for three years reached out to us for assistance in transitioning to a foster home to gain more independence. Our team informed him about his entitlement to a placement review by the Residential Placement Advisory Committee, a right he was previously unaware of. Encouraged by this information, he requested the review, and his children's aid society worker promptly initiated the necessary procedures to facilitate this change.

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



[Guardian angels](#)

A community support worker contacted us with concerns about a 97-year-old neighbour. She suspected the elderly woman was being taken advantage of by a man who apparently had control over her finances and vehicle. The worker told us she had reported these concerns to the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee (OPGT) several years ago, but never heard back. We checked with OPGT officials, who said they were investigating the situation – and shortly after, we confirmed that the OPGT had become the elderly woman’s guardian of property.

Click here to learn more about how we helped Ontarians with their problems

[Careers](#)



We continue to hire new staff – and currently have openings for [Early Resolution Officers](#), [Legal Counsel](#) and a [Communications Officer](#)!

We offer:

- Collaborative, exciting work with exceptional colleagues passionate about public service
- Comprehensive health, dental and vision benefits
- Generous paid maternity and parental leave
- Hybrid working environment with an office centrally located on the subway line
- A commitment to work-life balance
- Defined-benefit pension plan
- Ongoing training and professional development opportunities

APPLY NOW!

See you next year!



From all of us at the Ontario Ombudsman's Office, we wish you the happiest of holidays, and all the best for a safe, happy 2024.

We had a wonderful time meeting and connecting with you in 2023, attending events across Ontario and hearing from a multitude of communities throughout the province. You can find us at our first event of the New Year – the annual conference for the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, from January 21-23 in Toronto!

Our Office will be closed on Friday, December 22 after 12 p.m., Monday, December 25 and Tuesday, December 26. We will be available again on Wednesday, December 27. We will also be closed on Friday, December 29 after 12 p.m., Monday, January 1, and working again on January 2.
In the meantime, [complaints can still be made online.](#)



File a complaint or contact us here



government agencies and municipalities, universities and school boards, as well as child protection services and French language services. The Ombudsman's investigations have benefited millions of Ontarians and prompted widespread reforms, including improved newborn screening, a more secure lottery system, and better tracking of inmates in segregation.

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.

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