

In our March newsletter: Francophonie Month:
Celebrating the diversity of French culture in
Ontario, Ombudsman makes proposals to
strengthen legislation, and more

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ONTARIO OMBUDSMAN NEWSLETTER



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Francophonie Month: Celebrating the diversity of French culture in Ontario



March is Francophonie Month, an international celebration of French language and culture. For Ontario French Language Services Commissioner Carl Bouchard, the month was packed with invitations to highlight and honour the contribution of numerous Francophone organizations in the province, and to discuss issues of concern to Franco-Ontarians.

On Francophonie Day, March 20, Commissioner Bouchard and Ombudsman Paul Dubé attended the raising of the International Francophonie Day flag at Toronto City Hall. Later that evening, the Commissioner was the lead speaker at a Law Society of Ontario event focused on his Annual Report. He spoke about the recommendations he made in the report to improve French language services in the province, which kicked off a panel discussion on the legal perspective and impact of his report's findings. On March 18, he attended the launch of Toronto's Francophonie Week at l'Université de l'Ontario français.

From March 14-15, the Commissioner visited several Francophone organizations in Ottawa, including the Centre des services communautaires Vanier, Centretown Community Health Centre, Collège La Cité, Museoparc Vanier and Montfort Hospital. He also attended a presentation of the documentary [Le dernier Canadien français](#) at the University of Ottawa's Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute, and spoke at the Gala de la francophonie plurielle.

In a media interview (in French), Commissioner Bouchard noted that Francophonie Month reminds him, as a Franco-Ontarian, "of the importance of promoting not only our culture but all of the linguistic rights that protect us, and also allow us to promote bilingualism in Canada."

Listen to the Commissioner's interviews (in French only):

- [Le Commissaire aux services en français à Unique FM](#)

- [Le nouveau commissaire aux services en français de l'Ontario de passage à Ottawa - Sur le vif, Radio-Canada](#)
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Strip searches at youth justice facilities should be a last resort: Ombudsman

In response to a request for feedback from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, Ombudsman Paul Dubé urged it to amend legislation to limit strip searches of young people and improve general search processes at youth justice facilities across the province.

“I am encouraged by the Ministry’s efforts to improve Ontario Regulation 155/18 in order to promote accountability and transparency with respect to how searches are conducted at youth justice facilities,” he writes in his submission. However, he identifies “additional areas where the Ministry should provide further guidance in order to promote consistency, accountability, transparency and oversight.”

He describes one case we dealt with in which a young person was routinely strip searched after meetings with his lawyer, contrary to the Ministry’s and the facility’s own policies. After Ombudsman staff raised the issue with Ministry, it reminded all directly-operated youth justice facilities that strip searches should not be used this way.

The Ombudsman makes 13 proposals, including that strip searches only be used as a last resort when all other options to ensure safety in a youth justice facility have been exhausted, and that legislation should provide more specific guidance on using body scanning devices as alternative search methods. He also calls on the Ministry to prohibit routine strip searches of youths, and to ensure Francophone youths are given information about searches in French. Other proposals relate to better reporting and staff training, and respecting the gender identities of young people being searched.

[Read the full submission](#)

Northern Ontarians deserve Ombudsman oversight too: Submission

As a matter of fairness, the Ministry of Northern Development should extend Ombudsman oversight to Local Services Boards, Ombudsman Paul Dubé writes this month in a new submission.

Local Services Boards provide a range of services to Ontarians in areas without municipal government – including roads, access to water systems, fire protection and waste services. They also collect taxes and fees. However, they are not subject to the same oversight as municipalities or municipal “local boards.” This means Ontarians in these areas have no recourse to the Ombudsman to complain about their local services, unlike those in all 444 municipalities.

“To ensure that all Ontarians have the same access to independent oversight over the provision of local public services regardless of where they live, Local Services Boards should be deemed to be ‘local boards’ for the purposes of the *Ombudsman Act*,” Ombudsman Dubé says in the submission, which also proposes that Local Services Boards be subject to the same open meeting rules as municipalities.

He notes that our Office has helped thousands of Ontarians with municipal issues – and concerns about closed municipal meetings – but has to turn away similar complaints about Local Services Boards. “When we receive complaints about a Local Services Board, we refer complainants back to the board itself or to the Ministry to raise their concerns,” he says “There is no formal oversight mechanism for such internal matters. My Office would be able to fill that gap.”

[Read the full submission](#)

[Here, there and everywhere](#)

Spring in our steps: Speaking with seniors



On March 12 and 13, Ombudsman staff attended two events hosted by the Older Adult Centres' Association of Ontario: The Seniors Active Living Fair at Bernard Betel Centre in Toronto and the Spring into Wellness Seniors' Fair at Bob Morton Centre in Barrie. We connected with seniors, support staff, and other exhibitors about how we help resolve administrative issues with driver's licences, ServiceOntario, OHIP, ODSP and much more.

On April 15, you'll find us at the [Spring: 55+ Lifestyle and Learning Event](#), hosted by the Ontario Society of Senior Citizens' Organizations, at Ellesmere Community Center in Scarborough, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Promoting human rights around the world

On March 26, Ombudsman Paul Dubé presented virtually to more than 200 ombudsman and human rights professionals from around the world as part of a webinar entitled "Promoting Human Rights: The Role of Ombudsman Institutions," hosted by the African Ombudsman Research Centre in collaboration with the International Ombudsman Institute.

He outlined several cases where we helped people access public services and raised awareness of their rights. "Our interventions lead to changes...such as seeing that rights are respected, that people are treated fairly by government, and that laws and policies are improved to deliver more fair outcomes," he said.

Talking fairness with future leaders

On March 28, Ombudsman Dubé addressed a group of post-graduate students as part of their ethics and government relations class at Seneca Polytechnic. He discussed the role of the ombudsman as a vital democratic institution and how we handle concerns about public sector fairness.

Empowering children and youth – all month long



Our Children and Youth Unit engaged with young people and numerous stakeholders in the child welfare sector throughout the month, including at these events:

- March 4-5: We participated in PowerUp! – an initiative by One Vision One Voice specifically designed for Black-identifying youth in care aged 13-21.
- March 5: We presented online to the senior leadership team at Hamilton Children's Aid Society, and Child and Youth Worker students at Toronto Metropolitan University.
- March 20: Our 2SLGBTQIA+ outreach team hosted an information booth at Sherbourne Health's networking event for transgender and non-binary youth.
- March 26: We spoke to children and staff at three group homes with Youth Resources Niagara.
- March 27: We delivered a presentation to the "Application of the Criminal Justice System – For Youth and Adults" class.
- March 28: We gave an online presentation at the P2PKE (Peer-to-Peer Knowledge Exchange), hosted by StepStones for Youth and the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS).

Connecting with conservation authorities

On March 18, Acting Investigations Manager Carmen Kallideen and Legal Counsel Brittany Ross-Fichtner were invited to speak about our work to officials with Conservation Ontario and individual conservation authorities.

Conservation authorities are community-based watershed management agencies

responsible for protecting people and property from flooding and other hazards. The types of complaints we receive about them include issues like decision delays, inaccessible public meetings, or permit approval processes.

We explained how we help resolve cases by facilitating communication between authorities and complainants. We also shared tips for holding closed meetings, inspired by our work with municipalities. See our municipal [Open Meetings Guide](#) here.

Does your public sector organization have questions about how we work? Contact us at info@ombudsman.on.ca.

How we helped: Case summaries

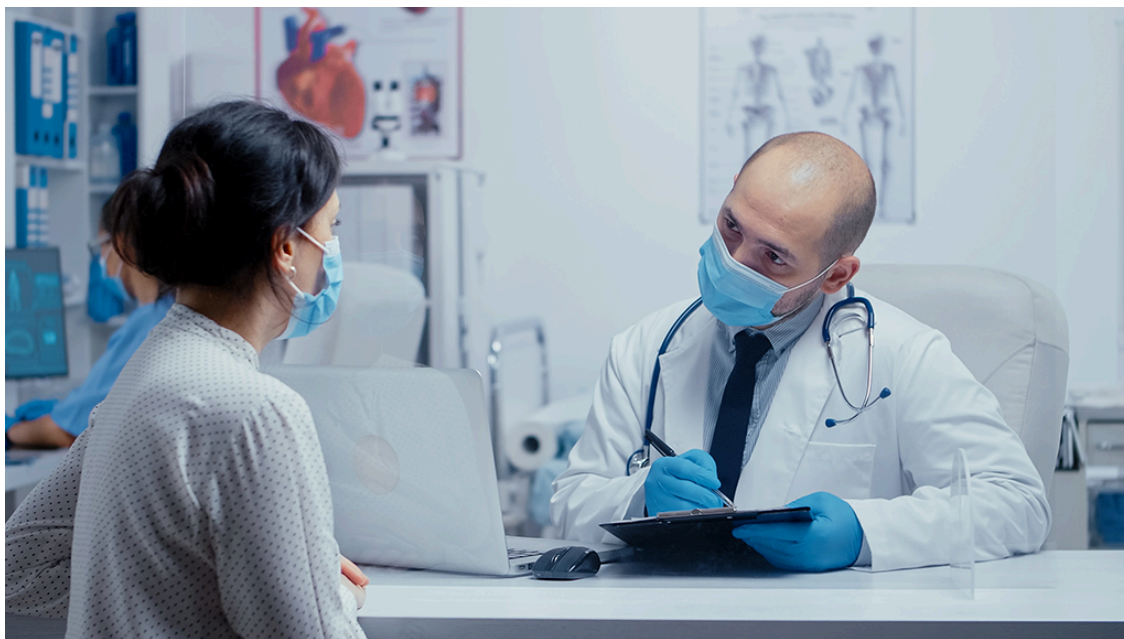


At your service

A mother sought our help when a DriveTest centre wouldn't let her daughter bring her certified service dog on her road test. The third party that administered testing at this centre told us that they don't allow any animals, including service animals, in vehicles.

RESULT: We raised this case with officials at the Ministry. Shortly thereafter, we were told that service animals are now allowed in all DriveTest vehicles, and the DriveTest website was updated to reflect this change.

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



Patient understanding

A woman in Northern Ontario went to the emergency room of a designated hospital and was greeted by an employee who asked her COVID-19 screening questions in English only. Then, at intake, she could not access services in French. She told us that when she asked a nurse if he spoke French, it “really caused a scene.” We talked to the hospital’s Department of Patient Relations.

RESULT: As a result of our intervention, the hospital’s emergency services reviewed the patient’s file and:

- Reminded emergency employees of the protocol for patients who identify as Francophones;
- Referred members of the public to the nearby call intake service, where there are always bilingual employees if no bilingual screening staff are present;
- Posted communications regarding COVID screening in English and French at all points of entry; and
- Had the Department of Human Resources review the French service requirements to include individual responsibilities in employee onboarding sessions, even for non-bilingual employees.

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



[Opening Doors](#)

An 18-year-old youth sought our assistance after her transition into a housing program and completion of her final high school semester were disrupted. She faced challenges contacting her Children's Aid Society (CAS) worker, who had unexpectedly taken a leave of absence, and the school informed her of their inability to accommodate her.

RESULT: We contacted a CAS supervisor, who discovered that the youth had been enrolled in another school by her worker before the leave, thus securing her a spot. The youth was happy to hear this news. Shortly thereafter, she also secured a place in the housing program, further increasing her satisfaction with the outcome.

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

[Careers](#)



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

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](#)

[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. 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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