

In our November newsletter: Listening to youth in custody, supporting transparency in municipal government, helping new Francophone arrivals, and more

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ONTARIO OMBUDSMAN NEWSLETTER



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Listening to youth in custody: Inside Roy McMurtry Youth Centre

The rights of young people were a key focus of our work this month, as members of our team spent two days meeting with youth at the Roy McMurtry Youth Centre in Brampton.

An important part of our work is hearing the concerns of youths in custody about the services they are receiving, and ensuring their rights are respected. The visit coincided with the youths' November school break, which allowed time for our staff to meet with each one privately – about 100 in all.

The centre is Ontario's largest secure custody and detention centre, housing youth who are awaiting trial or serving sentences under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. Our team visited every unit at the centre and held individual and group discussions. We explained the Ombudsman's mandate, the many ways we help children and youth, and asked residents about their experiences at the centre and in interacting with our Office.

National Child Day: Our Office also marked National Child Day on November 20, recognizing the right of every child to be treated with respect. Ombudsman Ontario is dedicated to helping uphold the rights of all children, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

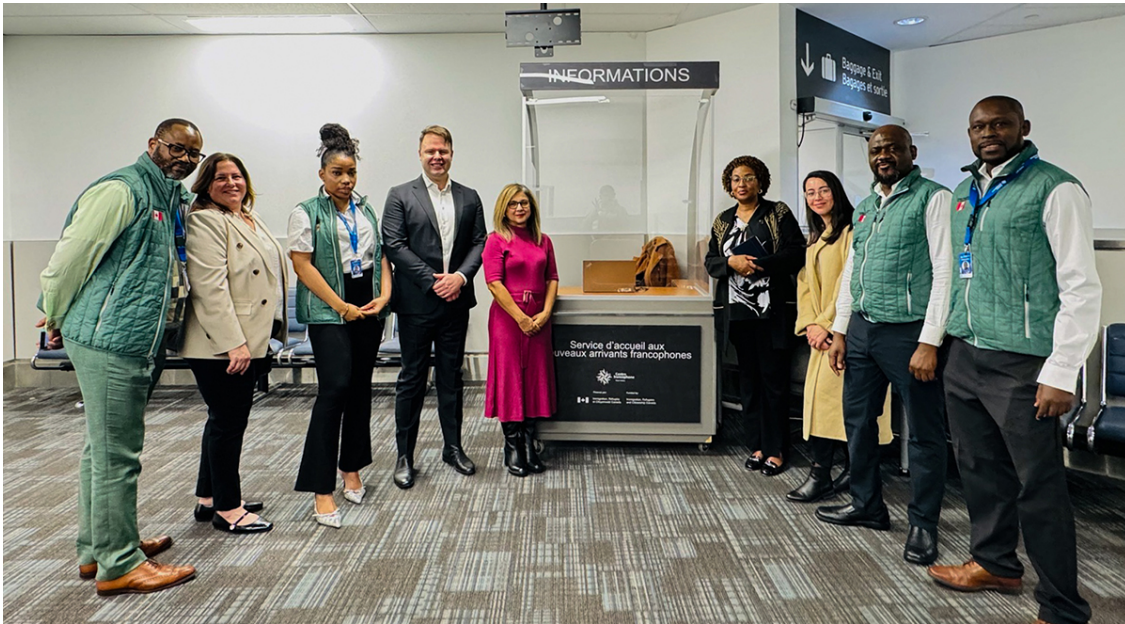
On the path to reconciliation: Presentation by the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites associated with Indian Residential Schools



In the spirit of Call to Action number 57 of the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report](#) – providing ongoing educational opportunities to public servants – we were grateful to welcome Kimberly Murray, the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burials Sites associated with Indian Residential Schools, to our office on November 8, just 10 days after she released her final report. Ombudsman Paul Dubé thanked Ms. Murray for taking the time to speak to our entire staff about her findings. “There must be truth before there can be reconciliation, and Kimberly has made us further aware of the uncomfortable truths we must acknowledge on the path to reconciliation,” he said.

[Learn more about the work of the Special Interlocutor and her final report.](#)

Walking in the footsteps of new Francophone arrivals



During the first week of November – National Francophone Immigration Week – French Language Services Commissioner Carl Bouchard and Director Anne Sophie Leduc visited the immigrant welcome kiosks staffed by the Centre francophone du Grand Toronto at Toronto Pearson International Airport. They walked through the process followed by all new immigrants to Toronto and learned how those who speak French are informed of and referred to the federal and provincial services that are available to them in French.

The Commissioner also spoke at an event to kick off the week at the Université de l'Ontario français on November 1, about Ombudsman Ontario's efforts to raise awareness among French-speaking newcomers about how we can help them access provincial services in French.

SAVE THE DATE: French Language Services Commissioner's Annual Report is coming December 5! Commissioner Bouchard will release his Annual Report and recommendations for the improvement of French language services at a press conference on Thursday, December 5. The report covers the work of our French Language Services Unit between October 1, 2023 and September 30, 2024.



COMING
SOON

2023
-
2024



French Language Services Commissioner's Annual Report

Open meetings: Supporting transparency in local government

Municipal meetings in Ontario should always be open to the public, with a few narrow exceptions. The Ombudsman is the open meeting investigator for most of Ontario's 444 municipalities, and has issued findings in 15 cases in the past three months.

Some examples:

- The City of Hamilton did not violate the open meeting rules when its mayor convened an interview panel, which advised her on selecting a new City Manager pursuant to her "strong mayor" power. The Ombudsman determined that the panel was not a committee of council or a local board and its gatherings were not "meetings" for the purpose of the open meeting rules in the *Municipal Act, 2001*: <https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/resources/reports,-cases-and-submissions/municipal-meetings/2024/city-of-hamilton>
- A closed meeting held jointly by the councils for the Town of Grimsby, the Town of Lincoln and the Township of West Lincoln broke the open meeting rules because it included small-group discussions that materially advanced council business: <https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/resources/reports,-cases-and-submissions/municipal-meetings/2024/towns-of-grimsby-and-lincoln-and-township-of-west-lincoln>
- The City of Oshawa's notice of an upcoming committee meeting was temporarily unavailable on its website due to a technical issue, but it didn't break the rules because city staff responded promptly to fix the problem: <https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/resources/reports,-cases-and-submissions/municipal-meetings/2024/city-of-oshawa>
- The Town of Iroquois Falls council should have included more detail in its resolution to close a meeting to discuss a letter from a

resident: <https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/resources/reports,-cases-and-submissions/municipal-meetings/2024/town-of-iroquois-falls>

All of our open meeting decisions can be found in [our Open Meetings Case Digest](#).

[Here, there and everywhere](#)



Meeting with tomorrow's leaders: 2024-2025 OLIP interns

On November 8, Ombudsman Paul Dubé, Deputy Ombudsman Barbara Finlay and French Language Services Commissioner Carl Bouchard spoke to this year's Ontario Legislature Internship Programme (OLIP) participants. The interns are recent university graduates who spend 10 months working with MPPs of all parties. "It was a pleasure to have discussions about public sector accountability with future leaders," Ombudsman Dubé said on social media. "I continue to be impressed by every cohort of OLIP interns."

Library-goers, seniors, newcomers...how can we help you?

On November 6, Communications Officer Mélina Bouchard gave an online talk to the public, hosted by Vaughan Public Libraries. She explained how our Office can help ensure fair treatment by provincial and public sector services like the Ontario Health Insurance Program, ServiceOntario, the Ontario Disability Support Program, school boards, post-secondary institutions, and more.



On November 14, we attended a fair hosted by the Ontario Society of Senior Citizens' Organizations in North York. We answered questions and connected with seniors and local organizations to explain how we help resolve issues with government services.

On November 25, our staff spoke to newcomers supported by Catholic Crosscultural Services (CCS), an organization that assists refugees and immigrants regardless of religion or background. We told them about the types of complaints we address, and how we can help if they aren't sure where to turn.

If your organization wants to learn more about what we do, email us at info@ombudsman.on.ca to schedule a presentation or request our [brochures in various languages](#).



Reaching 2SLGBTQIA+ youth

Members of our Communications team and Children and Youth Unit connected with 2SLGBTQIA+ youth at Friends of Ruby Youth Centre on November 6, and at the No Time

to Wait Conference on November 22. The conference, organized by LetsStopAids, gathered around a hundred young people online and in Toronto. At our presentation and our booth, we talked about how we can help ensure all youth are treated fairly and have access to the services they need.

Bienvenue! Services in French now in Sarnia

On November 1, French Language Services Commissioner Carl Bouchard welcomed the city of Sarnia as the 27th area of the province now offering provincial services in French, as its designation under the *French Language Services Act* officially came into effect. The designation, announced in 2021, requires provincial government agencies and their third parties to actively offer service in French. [On social media](#), Commissioner Bouchard encouraged all those who speak French in the area to make use of these services, and to contact our Office if they encounter any issues.

How we help: Case summaries



Friendly assistance

A woman contacted our Office for assistance on behalf of her friend, who was a client of the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee (OPGT) and was struggling to pay for her day-to-day expenses with the weekly \$50 the OPGT provided. The woman told us she had tried to resolve the complaint directly with the OPGT but was unsuccessful.

RESULT: After we stepped in, the OPGT agreed to raise the weekly allocation to \$100.

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



No room for failure

Two Francophone students from Northern Ontario reached out to us with concerns about the quality of the French version of the accreditation exam for emergency medical care assistants. One of the students ended up deciding to take the exam in English. She had to pay for additional training in order to be able to understand the material in English.

RESULT: We brought this issue to the attention of the Ministry of Health who informed us that the English and French exams will also be reviewed to ensure content is equivalent in both versions.

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



[Routine violation](#)

A young person in a youth justice centre complained to us that he was being routinely strip-searched by staff after every visit he had with his lawyer. He told us he raised his concern with the facility, but staff maintained that all youth justice facilities in Ontario followed this practice.

RESULT: After we made inquiries with the facility and reviewed its policy, we escalated this case to senior Ministry officials. As a result of our inquiries, the Ministry sent a memorandum to all directly-operated youth justice centres, reminding them that strip searches should not be conducted as a matter of routine after visits. We confirmed with the facility in question that it had stopped this practice.

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

[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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