



ONTARIO'S WATCHDOG
CHIEN DE GARDE DE L'ONTARIO

Annual Report 2014-2015
Ombudsman's Remarks
André Marin

Thank you for joining us today, here in the Media Studio, and via live webcast. This has been a milestone year for the Office of the Ombudsman. Almost 40 years after the first Ombudsman began calling for oversight of the broader public sector, I'm happy to report that we will begin taking complaints about school boards as of September 1st, and we'll be coming to universities and municipalities near you as of New Year's Day.

I know there will be a learning curve for everyone involved as we take on oversight of more than 500 additional public bodies. Today's report is an ideal opportunity to demonstrate how we work and the years of experience we bring to the table.

We have worked with municipalities to bolster transparency and accountability at the local level since 2008, through our investigations of closed meetings. We have always helped college students and staff with their issues – including hundreds who were left in the lurch by the closure of Everest College this past year – and we will help those at universities the same way. As for school boards, we will apply lessons learned in our work with boards that were taken over by provincial supervisors in the past.

For anyone who has questions about how we work, or what we will do in these new areas, this report offers a wealth of answers. Simply put, my office is here to help when existing mechanisms fail. We resolve issues wherever possible, and use our investigative power to fix systemic problems when necessary. We will encourage and bolster local accountability officers, such as ombudsmen and integrity commissioners. But if those avenues hit a dead end, my Office will be there as a last resort.

You will find examples in this report of all the different ways we handle individual cases, systemic issues, and complaint trends that we raise proactively with the government to nip them in the bud.

This year also marks our 40th anniversary, and 10 years since I became Ombudsman, so we have taken the opportunity to review how far we've come. In the past 10 years, our Office has handled 193,038 cases and conducted 35 systemic investigations. The government has accepted almost all of the recommendations arising from those investigations, and we continue to follow up on them.

For example, 10 years after our first investigation, which revealed that parents of children with severe special needs were being forced to turn them over to children's aid societies

to get the care they needed, we had six similar cases where we had to step in and point out that this should not be happening. Our other big investigation from 2005 was also in the news, when it was reported that the newborn screening program was having problems with delays. We looked into it, and are now monitoring the program's efforts to make sure no precious time is lost in testing babies' blood samples.

Of course, this year we also completed our largest investigation yet, into the billing and customer service disaster at Hydro One. And even though it has been removed from our jurisdiction, Hydro One has four more months to report back to us on the 65 recommendations it accepted. We also reported on problems with unlicensed daycares, and the government accepted all of our 113 recommendations for better protection of children in unlicensed care.

Aside from these larger investigations, our staff also break through bureaucratic roadblocks that affect many lives every day – for example, by helping one woman get funding for a drug to treat her recurrence of breast cancer, they prompted a change that will benefit another 100 women in the next three years.

Our frontline staff and investigators work like translators in a game of broken telephone when communications break down between various government and ministry-funded agencies. We help thousands of Ontarians with the alphabet soup of government organizations like ODSP, OPGT, FRO, DSO, etc. We are there for the vulnerable, from adults with developmental disabilities to sick inmates who are wrongly stuck in segregation.

Since 2005, our office has reorganized and rebounded from the threat of elimination. Since 2010, the volume of complaints we receive has increased 86%. When we take on oversight of municipalities, universities and school boards, we will add another 548 organizations to the more than 500 provincial bodies we now oversee. As this report demonstrates, we are well positioned to take on this challenge.