

Update on Ombudsman Niagara investigation, the
Ombudsman visits correctional facilities, and more news
from Ontario's Ombudsman.

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NIAGARA INVESTIGATION NEARS COMPLETION

The Ombudsman team was in Niagara Region in January to conduct interviews and gather evidence as part of an ongoing Special Ombudsman Response Team investigation. The investigation focuses on an incident at a December 7 meeting of regional council during which a journalist and a citizen blogger were reportedly asked to leave the premises during a council meeting and had their property seized. [Read more about this investigation here](#). With most of the interviews now completed, the Ombudsman will soon begin drafting his findings and recommendations, which will be provided to the municipality for a response before a final report is published.



OMBUDSMAN VISITS CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

On January 25, the Ombudsman and Director of Investigations Sue Haslam met with officials at the Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre and toured the facility. The observational visit is one of several planned at jails and detention centres across the province, which are the top source of complaints to our office (some 4,000 per year). Ombudsman Dubé said he looks forward to seeing the infrastructure, living spaces and conditions of confinement firsthand, and meeting with stakeholders. Most complaints about correctional facilities are quickly resolved, but our staff flag urgent matters of health and safety, meet quarterly with senior officials to discuss complaint trends, and monitor potential systemic problems – such as the flawed system of tracking inmates in solitary confinement that sparked Mr. Dubé’s report, [Out of Oversight, Out of Mind](#).



WHAT'S NEW IN THE MUNICIPAL ACT? IT'S IN THE CARDS

Can you name the four new exceptions to the open meeting rules that were added to *Municipal Act, 2001*, effective January 1? Our two new [municipal “tip cards”](#) have that information and more, as a quick reference guide for council members and any followers of municipal matters. We debuted the cards at our booth at the [Rural Ontario Municipal Association’s annual conference](#), January 21-22 in Toronto, where Ombudsman Dubé and staff also attended several sessions and met with municipal stakeholders.



Check out our tip cards and other Ombudsman resources [here](#)

CLOSED MUNICIPAL MEETINGS: LATEST CASES AND NEWS

Township of Lanark Highlands: The Ombudsman found that council for the township contravened the *Municipal Act, 2001*, when it discussed financial software and another matter with staff in closed session on July 17, 2017. [Read the report here.](#)

Township of North Huron: A closed meeting on December 11, 2017, to discuss fire personnel did not contravene the open meeting rules, the Ombudsman found, because discussion fit within the listed exceptions. [Read the report here.](#)

New records: In January, council for the city of [Sarnia announced it would start recording closed meetings](#) – a practice that the Ombudsman routinely recommends to all municipalities for all meetings, to ensure complete and accurate records.

VISIT FROM THE CHIEF DIGITAL OFFICER OF ONTARIO

On January 16, Ombudsman staff heard from Hillary Hartley, the Chief Digital Officer of Ontario, about how her Ontario Digital Service team is working to transform government services. [Check out their website to learn more about what they do.](#)



VISIT FROM BERMUDA OMBUDSMAN STAFF

On January 8, our office welcomed Aquilah Fleming (left) from the Office of the Ombudsman for Bermuda. She met with members of our team to discuss our complaint handling and investigation processes.



NOW STREAMING: COMPLAINTS ABOUT MUNICIPAL DRAINAGE

Flooding, runoff, sewers, wells – drainage is a serious issue for municipalities, as Ombudsman staff have seen in our first two years of receiving municipal complaints. A steady trickle – about 30 per year – have to do with drainage issues, Ombudsman Legal Counsel Joanna Bull and Early Resolution Officer Jeff Cook told the [Drainage Superintendents Association of Ontario's conference](#) on January 25 in London, Ont. They explained how we've resolved cases by clarifying municipal processes (e.g., in one case where residents blamed the removal of a beaver dam for flood damage on their properties), and pointing out that our office is here to help as a “last-ditch” recourse. [Learn more about our municipal oversight here.](#)

FEBRUARY EVENTS - WHERE WE'LL BE

On February 15, Ombudsman staff will also be at the [Ontario University Registrars' Association](#) annual conference to share information and answer questions – and two members of our senior team will speak about how we work with universities to resolve cases. Our staff will also be at the Government and Consumer Services Fair at Cloverdale Mall in Toronto on February 24 - stop by to say hi and learn more about our work!



CASE SUMMARY: ZERO BALANCE

A student enrolled in a college's early childhood education program, but was unable to attend. She did inform the college, but because she missed the deadline to withdraw from the course, she received a grade of zero and had to pay \$1,400 in outstanding program fees. Our review determined that there had been miscommunication between the student and college administrators. As a result of our intervention, she was refunded the \$1,400, and the zero grade was removed from her transcript. Read more successful case resolutions [here](#).

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BROADER PUBLIC SECTOR CASES

The Ombudsman's mandate was expanded to include school boards on September 1, 2015, and
to municipalities and universities on January 1, 2016.

To date, we've received 2,020 cases about school boards, 6,174 cases about municipalities and
486 cases about universities.

Like most of the 21,000-plus cases we receive each year, all but a few of these have been
resolved without need for formal investigation.

[Learn more here](#)

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. Ombudsman Paul Dubé began his five-year term on April 1, 2016.

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