



THE WATCHDOG

Newsletter

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Ombudsman launches investigation of Toronto school busing issues

Ombudsman Paul Dubé [launched his first systemic investigation related to school boards](#) on Monday, September 26, focusing on recent school busing problems at the Toronto District School Board and Toronto Catholic District School Board.

The investigation will examine whether the boards' oversight of student transportation and their response to delays and disruptions at the start of the 2016-2017 school year was adequate.

“Nearly four weeks into the school year, we continue to receive complaints from frustrated families who are experiencing chronic delays or are repeatedly forced to scramble to get children to school when their buses don't show up.”

-Ombudsman Paul Dubé



Both boards have received formal notice and the Ombudsman's team of investigators will now conduct interviews with relevant officials and witnesses, and gather all relevant information from the boards and their transportation consortium. The investigation will be completed as quickly as possible, Mr. Dubé said.

Anyone who has information relevant to the investigation can [contact the Ombudsman's office through the online complaint form](#), by phone (1-800-263-1830), or email (info@ombudsman.on.ca).

This investigation follows two recently-released systemic reports, in which Mr. Dubé made a combined **82 recommendations** to government - all of



SEPTEMBER 2016

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.

[FILE A COMPLAINT ONLINE](#)

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CLOSED MEETINGS

Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands

The Ombudsman found that the township council's discussion of a zoning by-law application by email constituted an illegal meeting, and he recommended (for the third time) that council cease its practice of discussing

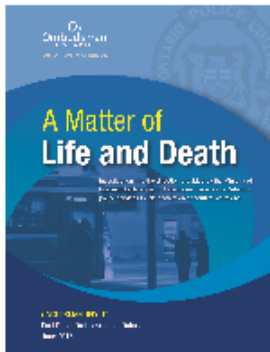
which were accepted. His June report, [A Matter of Life and Death](#), called for police to be better trained in de-escalating conflict situations, and his August report, [Nowhere to Turn](#), recommended reforms to services for adults with developmental disabilities who are in crisis.

School boards cases: 700+ in first year

Our Office recently marked the [one-year anniversary](#) of our oversight of the province's 82 school boards and school authorities, which came into effect on September 1, 2015. We received more than 700 complaints about school boards in the first year. Most were resolved through early resolution or referral, and no formal investigations were launched.

As of September 30, we had received 859 school board cases and launched one investigation - into Toronto busing issues. Topics include special education, to bullying, to busing, to school staff.

Worth sharing: Police de-escalation training



Ombudsman Paul Dubé shared the lessons learned from his recent investigation into how Ontario police are trained to handle conflict situations, at the annual conference of the U.S.-based [National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement](#) in Albuquerque, NM. Mr. Dubé presented to the international audience about his June report, *A Matter of Life and Death*, which prompted the province to commit to developing a new use-of-force model and increasing police de-escalation training across the province.

council business via email, noting that the law as it stands does not permit a quorum of council to meet via any electronic format.

[Read the report](#)

In another case involving a meeting that was closed to discuss personal matters about an identifiable individual, the Ombudsman cautioned council that its resolution to proceed in camera should provide more information.

[Read the letter](#)

Town of Goderich

The Ombudsman found that the Town's Recreation Board of Management falls within the *Municipal Act's* definition of a "local board" and is subject to the Act's open meeting requirements.

[Read the report](#)

IN THE NEWS

The Ombudsman sat down with Focus Ontario's Alan Carter to discuss his first six months in office and Toronto school busing issues. Watch the interview [here](#) at around the 14-minute mark.

Mr. Dubé also spoke with TVO about his approach to Ombudsman work, his recent investigative reports, and the Office's new jurisdiction over municipalities, universities, and school boards. [Read the interview](#)

Read about how we resolve complaints about universities in the University of Toronto's newspaper, [The Varsity](#).

The report was also the subject of host Michael Enright's commentary on the September 25 episode of Sunday Edition: "[The Ombudsman's report is] an eloquent plea for systemic and individual responsibility. His report is too important to be left to wither on a shelf beside earlier, similar reports and coroners' recommendations. It should be read by every police chief, every journalist, every judge. And by every police officer." [Listen here.](#)

Broader public sector: Recent cases and outreach

We've received more than **3,500** complaints about municipalities, universities, and school boards since our jurisdiction over those sectors came into effect. We've had **859** school board complaints since September 1, 2015 and since January 1, we've received **2,487** complaints about municipalities and **190** about universities. Most of these cases have been resolved informally, usually through referral to local officials.

The Ombudsman, Deputy Ombudsman and staff met with hundreds of municipal stakeholders at recent events in Niagara Falls, Kingston, Hearst, Oshawa, Minett and Cobourg, sharing information about how we handle municipal cases. Ombudsman Paul Dubé delivered speeches at the [Ontario East Municipal Conference](#) and the [Association française des municipalités de l'Ontario](#) annual conference, and answered questions from municipal representatives from across the province. Deputy Ombudsman Barbara Finlay spoke at a number of groups, including the [Municipal Finance Officers' Association of Ontario](#).

WHAT'S NEW?



What's new at our office? Check out the [Ombudsman's latest post](#) about his most recent speeches and reports, and other activities by our team, including a meeting with the [Ontario Legislature Internship Programme](#) interns to explain our role as an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly.



WANT TO WORK WITH US?

We're looking for talented people to join our **investigations and early resolutions** teams.



[Watch or read the Ombudsman's OEMC speech here](#)

Recent cases

Municipalities: A man complained to us that he received a water bill and a late payment penalty even though he had a \$600 credit with the utility. Our staff contacted the municipality and discovered that the man's original account had been closed and a new account had been set up without the credit being transferred over. The municipality transferred the credit and cancelled out the money owing, and waived the late fee.

School boards: A father contacted us when the principal at his daughter's school told him she could no longer attend the school, since the family lived outside the catchment area. After our Office contacted the principal and superintendent, the daughter was allowed to stay at the school for another year, and the situation will be revisited next year.

In another case, a student complained about the quality of education at his high school, and requested a transfer to another school. Our staff facilitated a meeting between the student, his mother, and the principal of the school to discuss the student's concerns and a possible transfer to a new school.

[Check out our brochures](#) to learn more about municipal, university and school board complaints, or [fill out a complaint form here](#).

Have a complaint about a municipality? [Read this first](#)

Have a complaint about a university? [Read this first](#)

Have a complaint about a school board? [Read this first](#)

Watch for more about our oversight of these new sectors - and the province - in our 2015-2016 Annual Report in early November.

Learn more about early resolutions [here](#). Learn about investigations [here](#).



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And stay connected with our office in both official languages! Follow our French Twitter account: [@Ont_OmbudsmanFR](https://twitter.com/Ont_OmbudsmanFR).