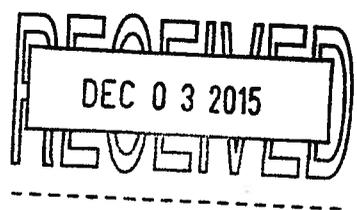


- Incoming Other
- Mayor
- Council DA
- CAO
- Building
- Finance DS DC
- Gas Dev DS DC
- Parks & Rec DS DC
- Training DS DC
- Public Wks DS DC
- PPP
- Social Services



November 30, 2015

Greetings,

With the New Year fast approaching, our Office would like to provide you with information about the expansion of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction to municipalities. As of January 1, 2016, the Ombudsman can begin accepting, resolving and investigating complaints about municipalities under the *Public Sector and MPP Accountability and Transparency Act, 2014*. The Ombudsman's jurisdiction will extend to municipalities, local boards and municipally-controlled corporations, with some exceptions as set out in regulation.

The Ontario Ombudsman is an independent officer appointed by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to conduct impartial investigations into individual and systemic issues relating to the administrative conduct of public bodies. The Ombudsman's services are available to anyone free of charge.

As we do with the tens of thousands of provincial complaints we handle every year, we will work to resolve complaints about municipalities wherever possible. We resolve most complaints without the need for an investigation or report.

We are an office of last resort, meaning individuals should exhaust any available appeal mechanisms (such as the Ontario Municipal Board) before complaining to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman also strongly encourages municipalities to resolve local issues at the local level, and to create their own complaint resolution mechanisms, which may include appointing accountability officers such as integrity commissioners, ombudsman and auditors general.

If internal complaint mechanisms are unable to resolve the problem and the Ombudsman determines that an investigation is warranted (either into an individual complaint issue or a broader systemic one), relevant municipal sector entities will be notified by our Office and required to co-operate with our investigation. The Ombudsman may report findings and recommendations publicly. However, the Ombudsman cannot overturn any decisions of a municipal sector entity, and recommendations are not binding.

The Ombudsman's Office has 40 years of experience in resolving and investigating administrative problems throughout the provincial government. We handle more than 23,000 complaints each year by applying alternate dispute resolution strategies – resolving over half of all cases in less than two weeks.

At the same time, almost all of the Ombudsman's recommendations for systemic change have been accepted by the government in the past 10 years, resulting in administrative improvements that have positively affected millions of Ontarians (e.g., expansion of newborn screening, a more secure lottery system, better monitoring of unlicensed daycares). We have always received excellent co-operation from the public bodies we oversee.

We have recently reached out to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario and other stakeholders to share information about our Office's role. Today, we are also inviting you to complete a brief online survey (information attached) that will help us in responding to any complaints we may receive about your municipality. Please note

that we are seeking contact information for officials who have direct responsibility for areas related to complaint resolution, as opposed to protocol officers or communications staff. Although we are happy to deal with these officials for communications-related matters, when we make inquiries about complaints, we communicate directly with staff who have the most relevant information about the matter at issue.

For more information about how we work and our new mandate with respect to municipalities, you might wish to review our Frequently Asked Questions at <https://ombudsman.on.ca/About-Us/MUS-FAQ.aspx> and our new brochure, *Complaints about Municipalities*, at <http://www.ombudsman.on.ca/Resources/Brochure.aspx>.

We also have an Open Meeting Law Enforcement Team which deals with complaints that municipal meetings have been improperly closed to the public under the *Municipal Act*. For more information on the activities of the Open Meeting Law Enforcement Team, please see our OMLET Annual Report here: <https://ombudsman.on.ca/Investigations/Municipal-Meetings/Municipal-Annual-Reports.aspx>.

Our latest Annual Report, published in July for the 2014-2015 fiscal year, also provides a good overview of our work. It can be found online here: <https://ombudsman.on.ca/Resources/Reports/2014-2015-Annual-Report.aspx?lang=en-CA>. You can also receive information about our office monthly by subscribing to our e-newsletter at <https://ombudsman.on.ca/Newsroom/E-Newsletter.aspx>.

My team and I would be happy to answer questions, provide copies of our publications, or connect you with our colleagues who will be working on municipal cases. Please contact us by emailing thewatchdog@ombudsman.on.ca, or call our Communications Officers: Laura Nadeau (416-586-3402) or Cynthia McQueen (416-586-3525).

Sincerely,



Linda Williamson
Director of Communications, Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario

Encl.