

Annual Report 2022-2023 – Ombudsman’s remarks

NOTE: These opening remarks were not delivered in person, as Ombudsman Paul Dubé’s October 5, 2023 press conference was cancelled. Instead, he released them as a written statement to accompany his Annual Report.

Good morning to everyone joining us today, in person and online.

I want to start by acknowledging that this land is the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.

This is a busy time at the Legislature, quite different from when I usually release my Annual Report, in June. As many of you know, this is the third report I’ve released here at Queen’s Park in the past five months, and the sixth report published by my Office in the past year. Quite simply, I thought it was best to delay this recap of the past year until all of our ongoing systemic investigations were completed and tabled.

That has given us a lot to talk about. For example, I am happy to say that all of the recommendations in the four new investigative reports we published have been accepted – that’s 213 recommendations in all.

Better still, many of them are already in the process of being implemented.

This means more inspectors are being hired to go into long-term care homes. Serious planning is in the works to ensure they are adequately protected and trained when the next public health emergency arrives, as I recommended in the report I released last month.

It means that more adjudicators are being appointed to the Landlord and Tenant Board, as I recommended in the report I released in May. Its processes and technologies are being overhauled to end the excruciating delays that were causing undue hardship to the thousands of landlords and tenants who complained to us.

It also means that vulnerable children and youth in care – including Indigenous youth – are benefiting from improvements that I recommended to several child welfare agencies, in reports I released in December and April.

In fact, the response to the investigations by our dedicated Children and Youth Unit this year was particularly heartening. Not only did the children’s aid societies in question take our recommendations to heart, several others incorporated them

into their training as well. They recognized the need to better protect young people in care, including vulnerable Indigenous girls like 13-year-old “Misty,” whose troubling disappearance was profiled in the team’s latest report.

Those investigations represent just a fraction of the 24,551 complaints and inquiries that were received by my Office in the past fiscal year. This report is filled with dozens of stories of individual cases where our team carried out one of the most effective but least understood aspects of the Ombudsman role: Early resolution.

I want to take this opportunity to highlight this work, because it is key to helping Ontarians understand the many ways we can help them.

I’m mindful of the fact that at this moment, the public is keenly aware of the important role that independent officers of the Legislature play in this province, thanks to recent reports by my colleagues, the Auditor General and the Integrity Commissioner.

I am grateful to them for their work, because it demonstrates the crucially important function of independent oversight in liberal democracy. Indeed, as I say in my report, liberal democracy relies on the independent oversight exercised by roles like the Auditor General, the Integrity Commissioner, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Chief Electoral Officer, the Financial Accountability Officer, and, yes, the Ombudsman.

But another reason I am grateful to the Auditor General and the Integrity Commissioner is that their recent work has made it easier for me to explain the distinction between their role and mine. And I think it’s timely for me to do that today:

Their mandates very clearly involve matters of government policy, value for money, and conduct of officials. Mine is very different – and that diversity of mandate is good for Ontarians.

Only the Ombudsman takes concerns directly from the public about the delivery of public services, and leverages that contact to improve those services.

Only the Ombudsman reviews those complaints, digs deeply into complex systems like the Ministry of Long-Term Care’s inspections regime, and recommends solutions to make the work better.

Only Ombudsman staff are stepping in to find the right person to connect a woman with autism funding for her grandson after she waited for two years.

Or helping a family track down shelter allowance payments that went to the wrong address.

Or helping a Francophone youth access special education programs in French.

There are dozens of stories like this in today's report. Together with our systemic investigations, they show the many different ways we promote transparency, accountability, fairness and respect for rights. And we are doing it across a wider jurisdiction than ever before.

As I say in this report, a great deal has changed in the past few years – in this world, in this province, and in my Office. Public services have been strained, and are struggling to repair the gaps exposed during the pandemic. Our work helped expose some of those gaps, and proposed ways to fix them. Of course, not all the results are rosy – there are still areas where progress has been slow, and we will continue to report on those and investigate where necessary.

But overall, we have seen promising results in every area: From correctional services to social services, to French language services and even ServiceOntario. We have also seen an increase in complaints in the first six months of the 2023-2024 fiscal year of about 16% across all units.

I hope we will continue to reach even more people in the next year, as we continue to expand our communications and outreach efforts, including with Indigenous communities.

Thank you, and now I'd be happy to answer your questions.

Check against delivery