



ONTARIO'S WATCHDOG  
CHIEN DE GARDE DE L'ONTARIO

**Annual Report 2011-2012**  
**Ombudsman's Remarks**  
*André Marin*

I want to thank everyone for being here today for the release of my Annual Report, especially at a time where there is an unusual amount of activity here at the Legislature.

Although there are political questions being debated all around us that I am not part of, I believe the work being presented in this report today can serve as an important reminder to everyone involved with the provincial government – and to the public – of the value of independent oversight of public services.

This is a multi-faceted report, and I'm happy to answer questions about any part of it. But first, I just want to touch on three themes.

First, there is the general value that oversight brings to average citizens who find themselves tossed on the stormy seas of bureaucracy. Our Office handled more than 18,500 complaints this past year – a 27% increase over last year. We helped thousands of people with their problems with the provincial government – people like the man who was overbilled \$20,000 by Hydro One, the families with disabled children who were wrongly denied benefits, or the couple whose drinking water was contaminated with Ministry of Transportation road salt. We're also starting to see improvements in police co-operation with the Special Investigations Unit after years of tension, after our latest investigation of the SIU and the Ministry of the Attorney General.

Besides helping citizens navigate the bureaucracy, we also work proactively with senior government administrators to find solutions to problems, lighting the way to better governance. Our work has helped turn around many government agencies and Crown corporations, and brought about reforms that have affected millions of Ontarians. That is why I am speaking out (in this report and in my recent submission on Bill 55), about the need to ensure the opportunity to complain to my Office is preserved for all public services, regardless of how the government decides those services will be delivered.

To see what happens when that opportunity isn't there, we need only look at the MUSH sector. We received 2,539 complaints about **municipalities**, **universities**, **school boards**, **hospitals** and long-term care homes, children's aid societies and police. That is the highest number since I started reporting on this issue in 2006. Many of these were serious complaints about child apprehensions, bullying in schools or municipal corruption, but we had to turn them all away.

Ombudsmen in Ontario have been calling for oversight of these areas since 1975, as you know. But what is so disturbing to me is that in that time, other provinces have moved forward in MUSH oversight, leaving Ontario dead last. In every other province, people can complain to their ombudsman about the child protection system or hospitals – but not here. There is no – and I want to stress, no – independent, impartial complaint mechanism for either hospitals or children’s aid societies; no one who has the investigative powers and independence of an ombudsman or who can resolve the kind of issues that we can.

That brings me to my third point – hospitals, the “H” in MUSH. I’ve focused on the need for oversight of hospitals in today’s report because I think the time is right, and because we received a number of complaints this year from people who were very upset about the only recourse they have in this province, internal hospital “patient relations” departments, or so-called hospital ombudsmen. One of the complainants is here today, Mrs. Daskalos, whose 93-year-old mother passed away in hospital in the kind of terrible circumstance we all have nightmares about.

Hospitals do face some new scrutiny these days by the Auditor General and under freedom of information laws. But there is still no one who can investigate, connect the dots and propose solutions to the real, human problems that we see in hospitals every day. Hospitals remain barred to my oversight (and to anyone seeking independent investigation) like some kind of medieval fortress – as do the Ornge helicopters that land there. I think Ontarians deserve stronger oversight and greater transparency from both, and I remain hopeful that the government will address this issue.