



ONTARIO'S WATCHDOG
CHIEN DE GARDE DE L'ONTARIO

Annual Report 2012-2013

Ombudsman's Remarks

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Thank you all for being here on this midsummer day. This has been a busy summer for provincial news, and my office has been no exception. My biggest challenge in releasing this year's report is deciding which stories to highlight – there are so many.

Many of you know my office because of our big investigations and reports, like the one I released here a month ago on excessive use of force in correctional institutions. But the truth is, most of the nearly 20,000 complaints that my staff and I received in the past year did not make headlines. Instead, they made a difference in people's lives.

When bureaucrats told a father he couldn't get identification for his baby daughter without a signature from his wife – who had died after giving birth – we were there to set things straight. When a mother became frantic over a missing child support payment of \$5,000, we helped find it, in a battered package that got lost between government offices.

Whether it's a quick fix like getting someone's calls returned, or a longstanding, complex issue like operational stress injury amongst police officers, my staff and I work to find sensible solutions.

We help citizens get what they need from government, and alert bureaucrats to problems before they get out of control. Sometimes we are quiet and unseen; sometimes we have to make noise. We use our array of tools and expertise to make government run better. And we do it independently, away from the cut and thrust of politics.

But government must do its part and follow through. It is one thing to resolve a case quickly, which we often do without resorting to a formal investigation or report. But if the resolution is not followed up with action, it's as hollow as a broken promise.

That is why I'm taking the opportunity today to remind the government of some unfinished business. For example, two years ago, just after the House shut down for the last election, the ministers of Transportation and Health and Long-Term Care announced that they agreed with me that the non-emergency medical transportation industry should be regulated. Our investigators had uncovered serious problems with maintenance, staff training and infection control in these vehicles, which transport hundreds of thousands of Ontarians every year. Everyone agreed regulation was needed. The issue was resolved in the public interest, so there was no need for me to publish a big report.

Two years later, the two ministers are now Premier and Deputy Premier – but regulation has not yet happened. I am hopeful that by reminding them of this unfinished business today, using my “horsefly” role, as my report describes it, I can nudge them back to action on this important issue.

Similarly, it’s been three years since the G20 summit in Toronto, when police powers were expanded under the infamous *Public Works Protection Act* of 1939. After my report on this in December 2010, the government promised to replace the *PWPA*. Again, everyone agreed. But thanks to last year’s prorogation, this is more unfinished business.

And then there is the business I told you about last year at this time. The premier had just told me he was prepared to open up part of the MUSH sector and finally start to catch Ontario up with the rest of Canada. Today, he is gone, but we are still dead last – the only province with no Ombudsman oversight of hospitals, children’s aid societies, and soon, thanks to a new law in New Brunswick, long-term care.

This is more than just unfinished business, it is a missed opportunity. As I point out in this report, my colleagues in other provinces have helped their citizens with many issues in the MUSH sector; here, we turned away 2,541 complaints – plus another 12 about the Ornge air ambulance service.

It’s also contrary to a groundswell of public support, not to mention logic. There is simply no rational reason not to allow citizens to complain to their Ombudsman about these publicly funded bodies – particularly hospitals, long-term care homes and children’s aid societies, which touch the lives of so many vulnerable people. All other provinces allow Ombudsman scrutiny of these areas, and all other Ontario organizations are subject to this scrutiny.

This report demonstrates the many different ways my office helps improve government inside and out. I’m hopeful that one day, our multipurpose and multitasking abilities will be put to full use, overseeing all the business of government.

Now, before I take your questions, I just want to remind members of the public who are watching us via live webcast that I will be doing a live chat at 2 p.m. on our website, and I look forward to hearing from them then.