

ATTENTION NEWS EDITORS: For immediate release

Ombudsman investigation exposes ‘danger’ of closed meetings

TORONTO (April 25, 2008) – Ontario Ombudsman André Marin today released a report warning Sudbury councillors that their closed-door meeting regarding the recent Elton John concert ticket scandal was close to the legal line.

The Ombudsman’s report, entitled *Don’t Let the Sun Go Down on Me*, explores the province’s new law on open meetings in unprecedented detail and was tabled at Queen’s Park for its educational value to all Ontarians interested in local government transparency.

Noting that closed-door meetings are “dangerous” because they fuel public suspicion, Mr. Marin urged that “local politicians should think long and hard before closing the doors and letting the sun go down.”

Controversy erupted in Sudbury over the sold-out March 2 concert when it was revealed that the 13 council members were able to purchase 120 tickets ahead of the general public. Told by the mayor to return some of the tickets, 10 councillors met privately on Feb. 20 to discuss the logistics of doing so. “What happened on Feb. 20 did not appear to be above board,” Mr. Marin noted. “No wonder there was enough distrust to inspire a complaint to my office.”

The Ombudsman found that because the gathering didn’t involve “the exercise of municipal power,” it did not technically count as a “meeting” under the law. However, he stressed: “This is not a case where vindication should be claimed.” Sudbury council has since voted publicly to end the practice of council members getting advance access to events at the municipal arena.

As of January 1, 2008, citizens can file official complaints about municipal meetings held behind closed doors. The Ombudsman is the investigator for these complaints, except in about 250 municipalities that have chosen to appoint their own investigators.

The Sudbury report is the Ombudsman’s second under the new law. The full report, along with more information about the *Municipal Act* and closed meeting complaints, is available at www.ombudsman.on.ca.

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Aussi disponible en français

Mr. Marin will be available for media interviews by telephone today between noon and 2 p.m. only. To arrange an interview, please call:

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