

# Complaints about SCHOOL BOARDS

www.ombudsman.on.ca • 1-800-263-1830

**The Ontario Ombudsman has the power to investigate and resolve complaints about municipalities, universities and school boards, as of these dates:**

- **Municipalities Jan. 1, 2016**
- **Universities Jan. 1, 2016**
- **School boards Sept. 1, 2015**

This new mandate is thanks to Bill 8, the new *Public Sector and MPP Accountability and Transparency Act, 2014*.

It means we can help Ontarians who have problems with these bodies, just as we help them with the 500+ provincial government organizations we oversee.

Our services include referrals, complaint resolution, independent investigations of individual and systemic issues, and recommendations to improve government administration, service and accountability.

*“We do not replace existing complaint mechanisms; we ensure they work as they should.”*

– *Ombudsman André Marin Annual Report 2014-2015*

## **Who can complain about a school board?**

- Students, parents or other family members
- School board staff, teachers or trustees
- Members of interest groups
- Anyone with a concern

## **If you have a complaint...**

- Have you already contacted the school board about the problem? If not, Ombudsman staff may refer you back to the appropriate local officials. We can help if your issue isn't resolved.
- Can you provide information about the issue and the steps you've taken (name of the board, officials you've dealt with, relevant documents, etc.)?
- You can review our complaint forms and information about the complaint process, our work and Bill 8 on our website, or call to speak to our staff for help.

## How we work

1. We assess all complaints and refer them to local officials for quick resolution wherever possible.
2. If local mechanisms are unsuccessful, we may attempt resolution and may contact the school board for more information.
3. If an investigation is necessary, the school board will receive written notice and will be required to provide relevant information and documents.
4. If the Ombudsman makes recommendations, the school board will have a chance to respond before any report is made public.
5. The Ombudsman follows up on all recommendations to ensure they are implemented and have the desired effect.

## Common school board issues

- Administration of policies: Discipline, etc.
- Responses to bullying
- Special education supports
- Services for students with disabilities
- Condition of school buildings
- Conduct and role of trustees

– *Based on complaints received before Bill 8*

*“Everything has been settled to my satisfaction. Thanks a million for your help.”*

– *Letter from complainant*

## Did you know?

- **FIVE** other ombudsmen in Canada already oversee school boards.
- In 2014-2015, before Bill 8 was in effect, the Ombudsman received a record **260 complaints** about school boards.
- Our office has **experience** with school boards. Prior to Bill 8, the Ombudsman could take complaints about any boards under the direct control of provincial government supervisors. We resolved complaints about several such boards in recent years, referring them to appropriate officials and following up with the supervisors.

## The Ombudsman is:

- An independent **officer** of the Ontario legislature
- A **watchdog** who resolves and investigates complaints about provincial government bodies and municipalities, publicly funded universities and school boards
- An **impartial investigator** who makes **recommendations** to improve public services
- An office of last resort that steps in when other complaint avenues hit a dead end
- **Confidential:** All investigations are conducted in private; complainants are not identified without consent
- **Free of charge:** No fees are charged to complainants or to the organizations complained about

## The Ombudsman can:

- Resolve **individual complaints**
- Investigate **issues** that cannot be resolved locally
- Conduct large-scale investigations into broad, **systemic** issues affecting large numbers of people (past examples – lottery security, property tax assessment, newborn screening, Hydro One billing)
- Require officials to **co-operate** with investigations and provide relevant evidence
- **Recommend** changes to fix bureaucratic problems and improve governance, accountability and transparency

## The Ombudsman cannot:

- Overturn decisions of government bodies, including municipalities, universities or school boards
- Issue penalties; his recommendations are not binding
- Investigate private corporations, decisions of courts, the federal government or municipal police

## Did you know?

“Ombudsman” is Swedish for “citizen’s representative.” The first ombudsman was created in Sweden in 1809 to help people bring their concerns to the government’s attention.

# How to reach us

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