



MUSH sector accountability – Opening Remarks – André Marin

Today's announcement that the government plans to increase accountability of the MUSH sector marks the beginning of historic change in Ontario – one that has been 35 years in the making.

Thirty-five years ago this month, my predecessor Arthur Maloney, the province's first Ombudsman, completed a report on the startup of his office, in which he said it was a huge mistake to exclude the broader public sector from Ombudsman scrutiny. He called for the Ombudsman's mandate to be, and I quote, "extended to include such organizations as hospitals, universities, boards of education, nursing homes and other such bodies financed in whole or in substantial part with public funds."

At that time, Ombudsman Maloney's office was already receiving about 500 complaints every year about municipalities and these other bodies, but had to turn them away. Today, even after 35 years of turning them away, we still receive more than 2,000 MUSH sector complaints per year.

Citizens expect their public institutions to be accountable. Our office hears them. We handle more than 20,000 complaints about Ontario government services every year. We can help you quickly resolve a bureaucratic glitch or dig into a huge systemic problem. But only if your problem is with one of the 500-plus organizations that fall into our jurisdiction – and not part of the MUSH sector.

It has always baffled Ontarians – including journalists, and, honestly, even me – that the Ombudsman's office can investigate, for example, Hydro One, but not hospitals. Lotteries, but not long-term care. Correctional facilities, but not children's aid societies. And this is only in Ontario – no other province bars its ombudsman from looking into the MUSH sector.

This bill is a chance to right that inequity. If passed, it will ensure independent oversight of all aspects of the provincial public sector. Wherever provincial tax dollars go, independent oversight should follow. And independent means reporting to the Legislature directly – to all MPPs, of all parties – not to the government or a Ministry. That is what an officer of the Legislature like an ombudsman provides, and there is no substitute.

If passed, this bill will finally open the MUSH sector to scrutiny. My office will directly oversee municipalities, universities and school boards. There will also be a new Patient Ombudsman, and the existing Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth will have the power to investigate children's aid societies.

I am pleased to have been consulted on this proposal, and I welcome it. Our office has always worked with existing complaint mechanisms. We are there as a last resort, to go where they cannot, and to ensure all of government is equally accountable to the people through their Legislative Assembly.

I look forward to discussing the legislation in more detail when it is tabled in the House, and I hope all parliamentarians will embrace it.