

Complaints to Ombudsman up by almost 30% **Annual Report 2011-2012**

TORONTO (June 19, 2012) – Ontario Ombudsman André Marin is calling on the government of Ontario to protect the public interest in tough economic times by ensuring citizens have the opportunity to complain to his office – as more than **18,500** of them did in 2011-2012 (up 27% from the previous year).

As the province grapples with the deficit and looks for ways to reduce costs, the Ombudsman can help ensure accountability and fairness in public services, as long as those services fall within his mandate, the Ombudsman says in his latest Annual Report, released today.

“While Ontarians understand the need for belt-tightening, it is crucial that efficiencies and savings are not achieved at the expense of fairness and good public administration,” Mr. Marin writes in the report. “The issue is not privatization, but the spectre of these services – without proper legislative safeguards – being removed from Ombudsman scrutiny, leaving Ontarians no recourse to complain about them or have them independently investigated.”

The Ombudsman urges the government to ensure that any public services that are privatized or otherwise delegated remain subject to Ombudsman oversight. MPPs should heed the lessons learned from the scandal-plagued air ambulance service Ornge, he says. “Who knows? If we’d had the ability to investigate allegations about Ornge received from patients and their families, industry insiders and whistleblowers, we might have been able to prompt the government into taking action. This is exactly the kind of proactive work we have done with many ministries and organizations.”

The Ombudsman’s report details how his office helped Ontarians in the past year, and updates major systemic investigations and case resolutions. He also draws the government’s attention to Ontario’s “dead last” position, compared to other provinces, in allowing ombudsman oversight of the “MUSH” sector – **municipalities, universities, school boards, hospitals and long-term care homes, children’s aid societies and police** – despite a record **2,539** complaints about these areas.

The need for oversight of hospitals – a power that every other provincial ombudsman has – is particularly acute, Mr. Marin says, noting that internal “patient relations” staff at hospitals are no substitute for an independent investigator.

Among the results sparked by Ombudsman investigations in 2011-2012 is a significant increase in police notifications to the Special Investigations Unit, after Mr. Marin’s December 2011 report *Oversight Undermined* revealed a disturbing lack of police co-operation with the SIU. In today’s report, Mr. Marin reiterates his call for strong legislation to support the SIU and consequences for police services that don’t comply with their legal obligations. He also stresses

the need for strict impartiality by SIU staff, after two SIU investigators were fired and two others disciplined for wearing police rings – a practice prohibited since the Ombudsman’s first investigation of the agency in 2008.

“It’s one thing for the police to meet their legal obligations to co-operate with the SIU. But the SIU also has to do its part and vigorously and independently fulfill its mandate as a police watchdog agency,” Mr. Marin commented.

In the wake of other recent Ombudsman investigations, consultation on the regulation of medical transportation services is now under way, breast cancer patients with tumours under 1 cm are receiving Herceptin treatment, and new legislation to replace the 73-year-old *Public Works Protection Act* (invoked during the June 2010 G20 summit) has been sent for third reading.

Proactive work by Ombudsman staff also helped resolve serious issues involving driver’s licences, services for inmates, disabled people, and clients of the Family Responsibility Office and the Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee – two of the top 10 sources of complaints. Mr. Marin’s office also dealt with a record 199 complaints about closed municipal meetings (a responsibility it has had since 2008), which will be detailed in a separate report, to be released later this year.

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Full report, backgrounders and more available at www.ombudsman.on.ca

The Ombudsman’s 11 a.m. news conference will be livestreamed at www.ombudsman.on.ca

Video of Mr. Marin’s news conference will also be posted at

www.youtube.com/OntarioOmbudsman

Mr. Marin will answer public questions this afternoon at www.twitter.com/Ont_Ombudsman

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