

Ombudsman calls for open government in Ontario **Annual Report 2010-2011**

TORONTO (June 21, 2011) – Ontario Ombudsman André Marin today called on the government of Ontario to embrace the worldwide trend toward open government, noting that many of his investigations of government organizations revealed a lack of transparency and accountability to Ontarians.

“Ontario has an opportunity to be a leader here,” Mr. Marin says in the first annual report of his second five-year term as Ombudsman. “When government decision-making remains closed, those it serves are left frustrated and anxious.”

The rise of social media and unprecedented public access to real-time information has had repercussions around the globe – raising public expectations of transparency in government, says Mr. Marin. “The days when governments could control the message and choose how to manage public information are gone,” he says, urging the government to think pro-actively about releasing information instead of simply reacting to requests.

The Ombudsman cited several examples of how his work revealed government decisions that were less than transparent – the best known being the expansion of police powers for last summer’s G20 summit in Toronto. As his December 2010 report, *Caught in the Act*, documented, the province quietly passed a new regulation under wartime legislation and failed to warn the public about it, contributing to massive violations of civil rights. The province has since pledged to scrap the *Public Works Protection Act* and better inform the public in future.

Another such case was detailed in Mr. Marin’s August 2010 report *The LHIN Spin*, after he found Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs) had, contrary to their public-engagement mandate, illegally allowed closed meetings for “education” purposes. All LHINs have since changed their bylaws and adopted new guidelines for community engagement.

Other areas of the Ombudsman’s report that touch on the “open government” theme include:

- **Long-term care home inspections (page 39):** While the province was posting inspection results online as promised, the information was often grossly outdated, inaccurate and incomprehensible.
- **MUSH sector oversight (page 12):** Unlike any other province, Ontario shields **Municipalities, Universities, School boards and Hospitals** (as well as long-term care homes, children’s aid societies and police) from Ombudsman scrutiny, meaning Mr. Marin’s office had to turn away 1,963 complaints about these organizations this year.

The report also includes summaries of many of the thousands of individual cases resolved by the Ombudsman and staff, as well as examples of serious issues that his office flagged and dealt with proactively in meetings with senior officials from the most complained about organizations.

As in previous years, the exposure of lack of transparency in such cases has ultimately led to better governance, Mr. Marin says, citing examples such as his 2006 probe of the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation's secretive methods, his 2007 investigation of the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation's initial disinterest in insider wins, and his 2009 revelation of the arbitrary funding cap on the cancer drug Avastin.

"I have no doubt that the government of Ontario and its administrators aspire to be open and transparent," says Mr. Marin, challenging them to "embrace openness and transparency not just as generic policy but as their creed and their greatest contribution."

-30-

Aussi disponible en français

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

He will also speak at an event at 6 p.m. tonight: www.meetup.com/third-tuesday-toronto/events/21163721/

Sign up for our e-newsletter: thewatchdog@ombudsman.on.ca

For further information, please contact:

Linda Williamson Director of Communications Tel: 416-586-3426 lwilliamson@ombudsman.on.ca	Patricia Tomasi Communications Officer Tel: 416-586-3402 ptomasi@ombudsman.on.ca	Ashley Bursey Communications Officer Tel: 416-586-3521 abursey@ombudsman.on.ca
---	--	--