

NOTE: UNDER EMBARGO to 11 a.m., June 27, 2018

**Opening remarks – Paul Dubé
Annual Report 2017-2018**

Good morning and thank you all for being here, and for watching via webcast.

I am here today to release my Annual Report on the work of my Office over the past fiscal year. This report demonstrates the many ways in which we, as an independent, non-partisan oversight office, enhance governance by promoting transparency, accountability, and fairness. It illustrates the benefit of our work to the people and institutions of Ontario.

The report provides many examples of what an impartial office like ours can do to make public services better.

Of course, I am well aware that we are just two days away from the swearing-in of Ontario's new government, following the election earlier this month. We are also less than four months away from local elections across the province, which will undoubtedly see the election of hundreds of new municipal council members and school trustees.

I only mention that to reinforce the notion that as an Officer of the Legislature, I am independent of government and generally not directly involved in the political process. I report to the people of Ontario through the Legislature.

I oversee the administrative branch of government – the bureaucracy – to ensure citizens receive the service and fair treatment they are entitled to from their governments. Simply put, the Office of the Ombudsman is here, as we have been since 1975, to ensure ongoing fairness as the policies of those elected are translated into administrative action, here at Queen's Park, and in hundreds of municipalities and school boards.

Many of the issues we have tackled, such as police de-escalation training, or the provision of services for adults with severe developmental disabilities, have been receiving attention for more than 20 years.

What we often discover is that the most entrenched issues are problems that public sector bodies are aware of and often would like to fix. They usually stem from rules that are too rigidly applied, procedures that are overly cumbersome, or just customer service that is just not up to par. Sometimes it is due to a lack of resources.

It often takes someone credible, shining a light on the situation, and making feasible recommendations for corrective action, for positive change to occur. We resolve thousands of complaints every month. Most are dealt with quickly, as our staff help people navigate the bureaucracy and cut through red tape.

Some result in proactive, constructive suggestions to help public sector bodies improve their processes and ward off future complaints. A few become formal investigations that dig deep into systemic issues.

Overwhelmingly, public sector officials have accepted our suggestions and recommendations, and all Ontarians are better for it.

Some improvements have been many years in the making – the result of effective oversight complimenting the efforts of citizen activism to draw attention to issues.

Police de-escalation training, for example, has been recommended for decades by coroners' juries, as well as experts and families of people killed during interactions with police. Now, following our report, *A Matter of Life and Death*, it is finally included in legislation and will be part of a new Ontario Police College curriculum.

We are also seeing progress on how the province handles inmates who are in solitary confinement, a longstanding, difficult issue that we investigated and proposed solutions for last year.

Another issue citizens have struggled with for years is the complex system of services for people with developmental disabilities, as documented in our 2016 report, *Nowhere to Turn*. We have seen steady improvement as my recommendations continue to be implemented, and we continue work with those in the system to ensure these individuals find adequate placements. While we continued to receive complaints from some families in crisis, stakeholders have told me they have seen the system improve since our report was published.

Oversight of municipalities and school boards is another issue with a long history in our office – in fact, it was raised by the very first Ombudsman. When our mandate was finally expanded to include these areas two years ago, they naturally generated thousands of complaints.

Today, I'm happy to report that all but a handful of cases have been informally resolved, and we have seen broad improvements in transparency and accountability at the local level. More and more municipalities have established codes of conduct, integrity commissioners and local ombudsmen – and many are also recording their closed meetings.

All of this is highly encouraged by our office, since local issues are best handled locally.

As always, we are here to step in, where local mechanisms fail or can't reach.

We have included many individual stories in this report that illustrate how we helped Ontarians with everything from birth certificates to student loans to utility bills. I encourage everyone listening to review these to learn how we might be able to help you.

And now I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.