



## Annual Report 2024-2025 Ombudsman's opening remarks

Bonjour, boozhoo, and good morning to everyone present and those joining us online today.

I want to acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples, who have stewarded these lands for generations. The work of Ombudsman Ontario takes place on the lands and territory of more than 130 First Nations, whose distinct cultures and histories predate the existence of this province. We are committed to

building respectful relationships with Indigenous people and communities to be able to provide more services for a better shared future.

It's an honour to release my 10th Annual Report today as we mark the 50th anniversary of the Ombudsman's office.

The Ontario Ombudsman has been providing valuable assistance to Ontarians for 50 years by helping improve public services and protecting their rights.

When this office was first established in 1975, the vision was that it would stand for the rights of all Ontarians. Its original logo was a gryphon – the symbol of a strong protector of people's rights and the rule of law. We steadfastly support that mission, and incorporated the gryphon into our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary logo as a reminder of those roots.

Over the past 50 years, we have handled more than 1 million cases, and conducted hundreds of investigations, resulting in more than 1,300 recommendations. The vast majority of Ombudsman recommendations to improve public services have been implemented, benefiting millions of Ontarians.

This year is also significant because we are reporting our highest case count in 30 years. And we are serving more people, in more ways, than ever before.

The 30,675 cases we received this year are a testament to demand for our services. We managed this high case volume with efficiency, resolving 42% of them within one week, and 53% in two weeks. This reflects our ongoing commitment to timely, impactful outcomes.

However, I have to say, the scope of this work makes it challenging to present an omnibus report like this one. Our mandate is vast and there are many issues to cover in a limited time. I want to address a few key points, and then I'll take your questions.

While much of our work addresses concerns around service delivery, many of the issues we encounter go far beyond mere inefficiencies. They raise profound questions about fundamental human rights. Nowhere is this more evident than in **Ontario's correctional system**, which is, frankly, in a state of growing crisis.

I say this based on experience and evidence: We receive thousands of complaints about correctional facilities every year and our team visited 12 facilities across the province.

Complaints have skyrocketed by 55%, to a record of almost 7,000. We are in regular contact with senior leadership in the facilities, and at the Ministry of the Solicitor General, to proactively alert them to problems. This enables us to contribute to satisfactory resolutions in hundreds of cases.

However, many of those complaints were about severe, entrenched problems:

- Overcrowding – three inmates in cells made for two.
- Frequent lockdowns. Inadequate health care.
- Indigenous inmates with no access to a Native Inmate Liaison Officer.
- Inmates with mental health issues being placed in segregation, which is not supposed to happen.

And then there was the Maplehurst incident – a two-day ordeal in December 2023 where many inmates were so poorly treated that they have had the charges against them reduced and even dismissed by judges. Now that the internal investigations into that incident are complete, I have launched an investigation into how the Ministry handled it and what it's doing to prevent it from happening again.

Overall, the conditions we're seeing and hearing about not only fail to meet basic expectations of fairness and dignity but, in some cases, actively undermine the very principles of justice and human rights we are committed to protecting.

This is a challenge that requires urgent attention and a long-term commitment to meaningful reform.

On a related note, we also saw a huge increase in complaints **from young people in detention and custody** – another group whose rights we have protected for 50 years. Our team visited several youth justice centres this year as complaints about them more than doubled. We met directly with hundreds of young people in these facilities to make sure they knew their rights, and helped them resolve their concerns wherever possible.

This leads me to some other highlights in other important areas of my mandate that I want to touch on, however briefly:

**Children and youth:** I want Ontarians to know that we are the Ombudsman for all children, whether they are in school, daycare, residential care, or receiving social services. There are numerous examples of results that we received in these areas throughout this report.

But one area of progress I want to note is that the province has heard our concerns about older teens who are transitioning out of the child welfare system. For the first time, it is moving to amend legislation to ensure we have oversight of all services for 18- to 22-year olds, and that those young people are informed of their right to contact us.

We are also making progress in our ongoing investigation regarding children being placed in unlicensed settings, which I hope to report on in the coming months.

**Municipalities:** This is our 10<sup>th</sup> year of reporting on our work with municipalities, and we received a record number of cases about them. We've found many municipalities to be greatly

receptive to the best practices and expertise we share with them to improve fairness, transparency and accountability at the local level.

The province has also heard our suggestions for strengthening codes of conduct and the integrity commissioner framework. This is right in our wheelhouse as a democratic institution, and benefits people right across the province.

**French language services:** The French Language Services Commissioner will release his own Annual Report in December. But I want to say I am gratified by the way the community has responded to the results achieved by him and his unit.

In fact, I want to share one bit of news that is not in today's report, because it just happened a few weeks ago: In 2021, we received a complaint that the Ontario Fire Code was not available in French. It was not required by law, because technically the Code is a regulation, not legislation. But we pointed out that it should be available in French as a matter of public safety.

A translation was promised by 2023, but did not happen, so our French Language Services Unit kept following up. This month, the Ministry of the Solicitor General approved a new regulation amending the Code and creating the first French version. It is now online, and will officially come into force in January.

**Good governance:** This bit of good news leads me to my final highlight, which recognizes the positive impact that our work can have. Earlier this year, I launched the Ombudsman's Award for Good Governance, to reinforce the link between sound administration, democratic values, and the protection of rights.

I presented the first award to the OPP to recognize its efforts to improve its service to the public in French. We plan to announce one for a municipality later this summer, and one for a provincial body in the fall.

I also want to report the good news that just last week, I my provincial and territorial counterparts in the Canadian Council of Parliamentary Ombudsman endorsed a set of principles designed to ensure the independence, effectiveness, and accountability of Ombudsman institutions across the country.

These principles summarize those established by the United Nations to define, promote and protect the essential role of Ombudsman offices in upholding good governance, protecting individual rights, and reinforcing public trust in democratic institutions. They will benefit people and public authorities we all serve.

Of course there is much more of interest in this report. So I invite you to access it online through our brand new website, which we redesigned this year to make it easier to interact with us and to find the information you need.

With that, I'm happy to take your questions.