



Message from the Citizen's Representative

Like all of you, I'm surprised at how fast the Fall is going. It has been a busy three months at the OCR. Last month, we released our Annual Digest for 2010-2011 which highlights some of the work undertaken by our staff during that period. From October 11-14, we celebrated *Good Governance Week*. This entailed hosting our annual coffee for delegates from the line departments of government and its public agencies who help us address citizens' inquiries and complaints. We also distributed bookmarks with our contact information to all the public libraries within the Province. Taylor Keefe of Eric G. Lambert School in Churchill Falls, NL, won our grade 6 essay contest. Her essay was entitled *What Good Governance Means to Me* and can be found on our website listed at www.citizensrep.nl.ca. Congratulations Taylor!

Over the last several months, I've had the opportunity to give presentations to a variety of groups. I gave a talk about the role of our Office to the Peer Advocates of the Seniors' Resource Center NL. The peer advocates volunteer their time to assist seniors experiencing a variety of problems. We all agreed that it was beneficial for the Peer Advocates to have an understanding of our role as they undertake their important work.

In September, I spoke at the annual meeting of the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation's Tenants' Association. The meeting was held in Gander and I was impressed with the commitment of all involved in sharing best practices and enhancing public housing in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As part of our Good Governance Week celebrations, I presented a seminar for Political Science 4680, Public Policy in

Newfoundland and Labrador, at Memorial University of Newfoundland. The course is taught by Ron Penney. We had an opportunity to discuss the role played by ombudsman offices in creating and refining public policy. Generally, ombudsman offices can affect public policy in three ways. First, they can modify policy through the development of recommendations which flow from citizens' complaints. Second, through its annual reporting obligations, an ombudsman office can provide feedback to the legislature on ongoing issues which may require new or modified policy solutions. Lastly, an ombudsman office can provide a source of expertise when the legislature or the executive are contemplating new or revised legislation. For example, over the last number of years, our Office has provided submissions on recommendations for a new *Prisons Act* and *Human Rights Act*.



Ron Penney, Adjunct Professor, MUN, and Barry Fleming, during Good Governance Week 2011.

Any groups interested in hearing more about the work of our Office are encouraged to contact us.

Best wishes for the
Holiday Season!



Barry Fleming Q.C.
Citizens' Representative

Designate System

The OCR uses a designate system for citizens' inquiries and investigations of departments and agencies that tend to have higher levels of complaints. Since 2003, when it first requested a designate within the Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment, the OCR has requested that each Deputy Minister or CEO appoint one person, usually at the director level, to respond to formal and informal inquiries from OCR investigators. While not requiring that the designate have the authority to settle all inquiries, the OCR does ask that the person be both highly familiar with all aspects of their agency's line of business, and be accessible during most working hours.

In consultation with departments and agencies, the OCR is able to work with over 25 designates to:

- obtain clarifications and clear miscommunications;
- obtain and review policies;
- obtain and review individual case information in accordance with legislation;
- provide referrals; and,
- in many cases, quickly resolve the issue to avoid the requirement of a time consuming and costly investigation.

In addition to our listed designates, the OCR has established contacts in the voluntary not-for-profit and community-based sectors who are valuable referral sources. These include the John Howard Society, the Seniors' Resource Centre, the Coalition for Persons with Disabilities, the Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Stella Burry Corporation and many others.

Seeking Fairness

The parent of a quadriplegic teenager contacted the OCR when Western Health stopped issuing community support cheques for the care of her son. This was causing financial hardship for the family. The explanation provided to the family was that all cheques issued to persons 18 or older had to be processed via Social Insurance Numbers (which the teenager did not have, and would take significant time to acquire). Working with Western Health's finance division, the OCR was able to get cheques issued manually until such time that the family could acquire a SIN.

Finding Solutions

Elizabeth contacted the OCR to report that her home was completely infested with insects and an Environmental Health Officer told her it needed to be treated immediately. Extermination of the pests would result in her having to dispose of all of the food in her cupboards. Elizabeth stated she could not afford the outlay of money for extermination or restocking her cupboards with basic foodstuffs. Through our contact with Human Resources, Labour and Employment, it was determined there were no sources of income for Elizabeth, but the Department did approve emergency funding for pest control and modest replacement of foodstuffs.

**Did
you
know?**

Since it opened, the OCR has accepted over 6000 complaints and inquiries from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Our current investigative complement has over 36 years of cumulative complaint-handling experience.

Questions? Comments?

Is your department, agency or community group interested in learning more about the OCR, its services and processes? Do you have a suggestion or question to be addressed in a future edition of *Insights*? Call us at 1-800-559-0079 or (709) 729-7647, or e-mail citrep@gov.nl.ca.

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