

Citizens' Representative Message

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the passage of the **Citizens' Representative Act**, which created our Office and set out the role and mandate of the Ombudsman in Newfoundland and Labrador, in line with those of other Canadian provinces. This was actually a return to the Ombudsman community after an 11 year hiatus with no service during the 1990s. Our forerunner office, the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner, was open from 1975 to 1990.

As someone who has been here since OCR's humble beginning, it has been interesting to watch this institution drop root through its initial role of investigating public complaints, through three expansions of our mandate to incorporate the whistleblower and anti-harassment roles we also play today. The public service has come along with us and has adjusted and improved its methods of working with us; moving from a point where we were being referred to as "Seniors Representative" (and in one memorable phone call early in my career, "Susan's Representative,") to a point where we are well known among the statutory officers of the House of Assembly.

Collectively, we now have almost 100 years of complaint-handling experience within the OCR. We've refined our processes; increased our research capacity; invested in our employees; and more importantly, we've stayed true to our core

mandate by confidentially helping thousands of citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador navigate their complaints about provincial programs, services and personnel. I will have more to say about this anniversary year in future editions of *OCR Insights*.

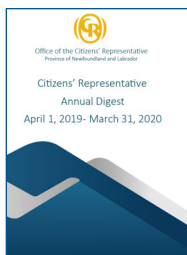
As part of our celebration of this milestone, we have reached out to all previous Citizens' Representatives to have them send in their official photographs for our website and our board room. Thank you to Messrs. Fraser March, Robert Jenkins and Barry Fleming for helping us out in this regard. In addition, I was delighted to speak recently with retired Justice David Peddle, the son of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Newfoundland and Labrador from 1975-90, Mr. Ambrose Peddle. Thank you to the family for sending in this marvelous photo of the Parliamentary Commissioner, taken by world famous photographer Yousuf Karsh, which will be included in our collection. He deserves to be remembered for his work as Ombudsman as well.

Bradley J. Moss



**Mr. Ambrose Peddle,
Parliamentary Commissioner
for Newfoundland and
Labrador (1975-1990)**

Citizens' Representative Annual Digest



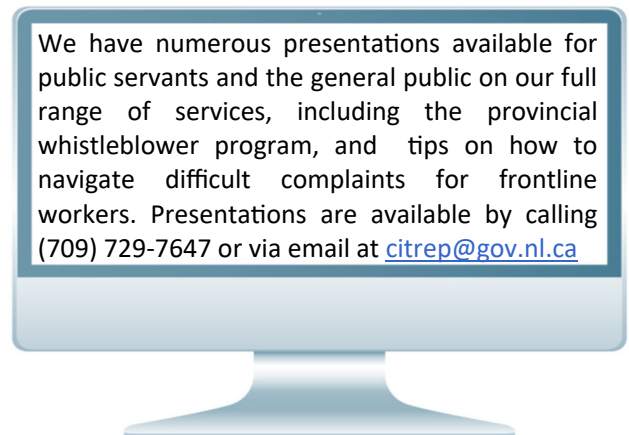
The OCR 2019-2020 Annual Digest was prepared for tabling in December 2020. The Digest relays statistical information on complaint volumes to our Office, and gives us an opportunity to share more about the day-to-day nature of our work. Last

year the Office received 696 complaints and inquiries, with 610 of those being jurisdictional. In the other 86 cases we were still able to provide valuable referral information, conflict coaching, or alternate avenues of redress for the complainant. We are starting to make some changes over time to the presentation of our Digest. This year, in our case summaries, you will be able to identify whether the case was addressed through an inquiry/early resolution; through investigation; or by the OCR lending support through navigation, self-advocacy and referral. Once the

House of Assembly reconvenes, the Digest will be tabled and available under the "Publications" tab on our website, www.citizensrep.nl.ca

We Deliver!

We have numerous presentations available for public servants and the general public on our full range of services, including the provincial whistleblower program, and tips on how to navigate difficult complaints for frontline workers. Presentations are available by calling (709) 729-7647 or via email at citrep@gov.nl.ca



Seeking Fairness

Several citizens reached out to the OCR in relation to a \$50 renewal fee for a journey persons' Certificate of Qualification, noting that Newfoundland and Labrador was the only province in Canada with the requirement to renew a Certificate of Qualification. The disaffected journey persons alleged it was unfair to require a fee to renew a Certificate of Qualification that does not expire. It was further alleged that the Province placed an expiry date on the Certificate which resulted in some journey persons being denied employment opportunities.

Upon notice of investigation to the Department of Immigration, Skills and Labour, it advised that during the previous three years, it had been working toward a new interprovincial Apprenticeship Management System with other Canadian jurisdictions. The historical practice of including an expiration date on the Certificate of Qualification was raised as an issue and a change to remove the expiry date from the Certificate was approved by the Provincial Apprenticeship and Certification Board and took effect April 1, 2019. The issue of the replacement fee was also under review by the Department. The OCR determined, in light of this information, that no further investigation was required. The current application form on the Department's website for renewal or replacement of a Certificate of Qualification states: "There is no payment for Journey person certificate renewal after April 1, 2019..."

Finding Solutions

An advocacy coordinator contacted our Office with concern for alleged unfair treatment and a lack of support experienced by a citizen. The citizen was reportedly assaulted at his rental unit and was afraid to return to the home due to the potential safety risk that remained. The citizen's situation had been presented to the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing (NLH) Emergency Housing staff, whereby a request for emergency shelter had been denied.



NLH informed that upon identification of a safety risk in the home, the citizen was instructed to report the risk to local law enforcement. In turn, if the law enforcement determined there was a safety risk, they would reach out to the NLH Emergency Shelter line to request emergency accommodations for the citizen. As NLH had not received a request from law enforcement to demonstrate there was a safety risk to the citizen if he remained in the home, NLH made the determination that the citizen was not homeless and should return to the rental unit. NLH subsequently informed the OCR that although the citizen did not meet the criteria to be approved for emergency shelter accommodations, given concern for the citizen's well-being, NLH would assist with accommodations.

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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