

## Citizens' Representative Message



Bradley Moss

Over the past few months, we've been preparing our Annual Digest, which provides a wealth of information about the day-to-day activities of our Office, statistics, origins of the complaints we receive, and our progress in following up on recommendations made. This important public reporting function not only opens up some of our work to aid in people's understanding of what we do, but also assists Members of the House of Assembly to understand where we are focusing our efforts on their behalf.

Like the other statutory offices of the House, we serve as an "eyes and ears" function for Members in our various areas of responsibility. In the case of the Ombudsman, this idea of an independent official who brings complaints forward to the government on citizens' behalf to level the playing field between the citizen and the state, dates back further than the Roman Empire, and in the parliamentary setting to Sweden in 1809.

In his recent review of the statutory Offices, retired Justice Robert Fowler stated these Offices "assist the House of Assembly in overseeing Cabinet and government departments. Question Period, committees, and debates can all be affected by partisan or political interests that can diminish serious evaluations from objective reality. By the same token, lack of time can constrain members in their ability to carry out in-depth assessments of the executive's performance or its use of resources. More importantly, perhaps, legislatures face an increasingly complex world with evolving technology and needs, where "doing politics" requires additional expertise. Statutory offices are designed to address these limitations, by serving as impartial evaluators and by offering specialized knowledge and resources that may exceed the scope and expertise of individual members. Furthermore, statutory offices provide a direct avenue for the public to share their experience with government services and implemented policies, as primary users."

Keep an eye out in the coming weeks for our latest Digest and thank you for reading *OCR Insights*, as well.

## Social Work Intern Student Connor Kent

Life, I have learned, rarely happens the way that we had planned! This past fall, after taking two years away from the School of Social Work, I was preparing for my return. When thinking about how I wanted to end my BSW, looking over a list of different placement options, I highlighted the Office of the Citizens' Representative (OCR). In truth, I was not, entirely, sure how a placement with the OCR would look; what kind of work would I be doing; what type of people would I be working with; and would it be the right fit? Eight weeks into the semester, I am happy to report that I am, extremely, grateful to the OCR for the opportunity that they have given me, allowing me to complete my final placement with them.

What is unique about the OCR, is the population that we work with – any citizens of NL. Of course, because of the nature of what the OCR does – accepting complaints from citizens who feel they have been treated unfairly with respect to their contact with government offices and agencies – the citizens that we work with are, often, more vulnerable.



Through using an intersectional approach – identifying the way that citizens' social identities overlap, creating compounding experiences of discrimination – I consciously continue to draw from anti-oppressive theory. Predominantly, I have been working with adults who are incarcerated, which inevitably means working with racial or ethnic minorities, those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, and citizens who struggle with mental illness and addiction. To instill hope in somebody, even if just for a moment, during a brief telephone call, is powerful. We need to recognize that we live in a hope-challenged world, and as social workers, we have an obligation to be hope providers.

We all end up living unexpected lives. Each opportunity that we receive moves us in a direction so that we can experience all that we are meant to. While shorter than I'd like, my time with the OCR has been rich and privileged, helping to prepare me for what comes next!

Connor Kent

## Seeking Fairness

The Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture (FFA) aligns the Province's natural renewable resources of fisheries, aquaculture, forestry, agriculture and agrifoods.

A citizen contacted the OCR with a complaint regarding the moose licence application process. The citizen stated that they could only apply for a moose licence online. The citizen had no access to a computer or the internet and felt it unfair that an application could not be accepted in any other manner. The citizen was willing to visit the local office of FFA and apply in person, if necessary. It was further alleged that the application process for other big game licences, such as that for a bear, was not exclusively online.



Upon inquiry to FFA, staff confirmed the process as described by the citizen. The application process for a moose licence transitioned to online application only based on internal data. As a means of resolution, staff suggested the citizen could avail of a computer and internet access at a public library to enable the submission of an online application. Our Office found this response to be unreasonable and upon further discussion, it was agreed the citizen should be able to go to a FFA service office and receive help from staff with the submission of an application on the available office computer. Staff advised they would contact the citizen to arrange for a mutually agreeable time for the office visit to complete the online application.

## Finding Solutions

811 HealthLine is a confidential and free telephone line staffed by experienced Registered Nurses. It is available to all residents of Newfoundland and Labrador any time, day or night and is administered by the Department of Health and Community Services.

A citizen reached out to our Office requesting a review of an interaction they experienced when they accessed the 811 HealthLine. The citizen found the encounter upsetting because they felt it did not have any trained staff to help them with a mental health crisis. Furthermore, they felt there wasn't an accessible internal feedback process available to have their concerns addressed.

In response to our inquiry, the Department advised that any 811 HealthLine user could call 811 to provide either negative or positive feedback. A Health Care Navigator (HCN) taking the call would be responsible for registering a call and documenting any feedback provided. The

citizen would be provided the opportunity to have a manager follow-up with them if desired. Regardless of whether this follow-up was requested, the HCN will forward the call ID number to either the Director of Clinical and Client Services (Registered Nurses) or to the Director of Virtual Care (Nurse Practitioners) for investigation. If managerial follow-up is requested, it is to be provided within three business days.

The citizen was satisfied that their concerns could be addressed directly through the 811 HealthLine.

### What We Offer

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](mailto:citrep@gov.nl.ca)

### 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 *OCR Insights*? Call us at 1-800-559-0079 or (709) 729-7647, or e-mail [citrep@gov.nl.ca](mailto:citrep@gov.nl.ca)

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