Office of the Citizens' Representative
Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

OCR INSIGHTS

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Seeking fairness...finding solutions

Citizens' Representative's Message

Each year we receive approximately 650 complaints and inquiries from citizens who are seeking assistance accessing government services and programs. We work hard to process those complaints and inquiries in an efficient manner. Our work in this regard can be greatly assisted when citizens are able to do a little "prep work" prior to contacting us.

Having a timeline of the events which preceded a citizen's complaint is important. We do not need a history essay, but having a concise outline of important events is helpful. We are also assisted when a citizen can list the individuals they spoke to about their concerns and any response they received. Finally, having a copy of any documents a citizen has received about the issue would be helpful.

It is important to note that the preceding suggestions are not mandatory. We have contact with many citizens, who for a variety of reasons, are unable to provide timelines, lists of contacts or documents. We are able to work with those folks to navigate their interests through the bureaucracy. Unfortunately, not having helpful information can slow down the resolution of the citizen's concerns.

Simply put, keep in mind the old Boy Scouts' motto - "Be Prepared".

OCR Activity Plan Tabled

Our 2017-20 Activity Plan was tabled on June 28. Over the course of the next three years, over and above its core mandate investigative functions, OCR will work to heighten awareness of services available to members of the public and government employees, with an emphasis on its whistleblower programs under the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* and the *Public Interest Disclosure and Whistleblower Protection Act*. Interested parties can read more about these programs by clicking on the "Whistleblowers" tab on our website www.citizensrep.nl.ca or by telephoning the OCR at 729-7647 or 1-800-559-0079.

We have numerous presentations available for public servants and the general public, ranging from public interest disclosure, to our overall mandate, to navigating difficult complaints. Presentations are available by calling (709) 729-7647 or via email at citrep@gov.nl.ca.

Seeking Fairness

A group of citizens attempting to set up a French language daycare as a co-operative had their application rejected on the grounds that the proposed French spelling of the word "co-operative" was unacceptable. At issue was the use of a single *accent aigu* (é). We searched the co-operatives registry and found that there were a number of other co-operatives registered that were technically in violation of the governing regulations, some didn't have the word "co-operative" in the title at all. We pointed this out to Service NL who advised the matter was under review. On May 31, 2016, Bill 30 amended the *Co-operatives Act* to allow the French version of the word.

Finding Solutions

An employee who had been harassed and discriminated against in his workplace complained that the process to investigate his concerns was broken and that his issues had not been resolved by the responsible department. Our review showed there were problems throughout the investigation that could have been better handled. It was further acknowledged that management could have been better trained in resolving issues like these more effectively. The department apologized formally to the employee and highlighted actions it would take including training in establishing respectful workplaces and conflict management for its managers. An independent review of the government wide harassment and discrimination-free workplace policy was subsequently completed by government and is now in effect.

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.

Office of the Citizens' Representative
Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

4th Floor, Beothuck Building
20 Crosbie Place
P.O. Box 8400
St. John's, NL
A1B 3N7

Tel: 709-729-7647
Toll Free: 1-800-559-0079
Fax: 709-729-7696
E-mail: citrep@gov.nl.ca

www.citizensrep.nl.ca

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