Office of the Citizens' Representative
Province of Newfoundland and Labrador
Seeking fairness, finding solutions.

OCR Insights

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Citizens' Representative Message

At the time of this writing, we are taking the final steps toward publishing our Annual Digest. The Digest is OCR's prime communication tool, a document of record that is highly readable and informative on the work we do. It provides statistics on our workload; provides a snapshot of results of cases we have considered; and it tells readers what they need to know on what our process looks like and how to contact us.

It is a true team effort: investigative staff are asked to put forward a number of completed cases each, that are reflective of their work and the outcomes achieved. The Assistant Citizens' Representative is responsible for compiling a working draft of the document for internal distribution and proofing. Administration looks after statistics, design and layout. Preparation of this document typically begins shortly after the end of the fiscal year and it is produced in a gradual fashion so as not to drain resources away from our core mandate services. Keeping production of this document in-house and utilizing the services of the Queen's Printer saves money versus contracting the work out for photography, pre-production, editing and printing.

I encourage everyone to take a look at the Digest after it is tabled in the House of Assembly this month, and I want to thank each member of the staff for working diligently to see this through to completion.

Contact us any time with any questions you may have about our Office, or for a presentation on the services we provide.

Bradley J. Moss

What Do We Do?

Occasionally, we are asked the question *What does your Office do?* While the standard and often simple response is that we accept and investigate complaints from citizens who feel they have been treated unfairly during an interaction with the Provincial Government, a more complex response provides insight in the varied manner in which complaints are handled once a citizen makes contact with our Office.

Not every complaint requires an investigation. Complaints are often resolved with minimal inquiry on behalf of the citizen. Conversely, there are other complaints that are resolved with extensive inquiry and informal mediation. Some citizens seek advice only, and benefit from general policy or procedural information that we are able to share or clarify. Where appropriate, we promote a citizen's self-advocacy to attempt to resolve the issue on their own. We often refer citizens to an available appeal process established within the Department. There are occasions wherein a citizen is seeking a service that is not provided within the Provincial Government, which may result in a referral to a community agency that can offer support to the citizen.

When our Office engages in an investigation, we sometimes make recommendations to the Department, Agency, etc., to resolve the matter for the citizen. There are sometimes recommendations that will improve individual and systemic issues in the future. There are also situations in which we validate that an administrative process is working well and we give credit where it is due.

More generally, Departments and Agencies will refer citizens to our Office for an independent and unbiased review of a decision following exhaustion of all mechanisms of appeal and review within the Department. When our Office identifies trends of complaints, we collaborate with Departments to address these trends. Our Office will also make formal comment based on our expertise and experience with Departments during any review of legislation and policy. Essentially, our Office seeks to respond to citizens and officials of the Provincial Government to promote good governance in the most respectful manner possible.

Seeking Fairness

A citizen contacted our Office out of concern following receipt of notification from the Motor Registration Division (MRD) of Service NL informing him of outstanding fines incurred under the **Highway Traffic Act** and a Notice of Suspension of his license. The citizen was not aware of any outstanding fines. In fact, he no longer owned the vehicle that acquired the fines and had transferred ownership of the vehicle to another individual through the MRD several months earlier. Upon inquiry, it was identified that fines had been added to the citizen's driver profile in error, therefore resulting in the automatic suspension of his license. The error had been identified and corrected; however, the citizen had not been advised of the corrective action taken. Service NL committed to issuing formal correspondence to the citizen with an explanation to resolve his concern.

Finding Solutions

A citizen complained to our Office having attempted to appeal a decision of the Medical Transportation Assistance Program of the Department of Health and Community Services. The citizen had been denied a claim for reimbursement of costs associated with medical transportation out of the Province and provided evidence to confirm submission of an appeal of the decision. Following a reasonable amount of time, a response from the Department was not received. The citizen alleged the Department denied him a full and fair opportunity to be heard. Following inquiry, the Department did not have any record of receiving an appeal from the citizen. The documentation for the appeal was resubmitted and the Department subsequently approved the claim.

From OCR staff

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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