



## Citizens' Representative's Message



This year marks the **50<sup>th</sup>** anniversary of the first appearance of an ombudsman office in Canada. In 1965, Simon Fraser University opened an ombudsman office to provide confidential, informative, independent and impartial dispute resolution services to students by providing information, advice, intervention and referrals. The first Canadian legislative ombudsman offices were opened in 1967 in Alberta and New Brunswick.

Over the past fifty years, the ombuds function has gathered wide-ranging support and adherence from a broad variety of organizations. Nine provinces and one territory now have ombudsman offices. Ombudsman now informally resolve disputes in the banking and investment industries, universities, municipalities and large utilities. A well-functioning ombudsman office not only provides a valuable, free and timely avenue for the resolution of citizen/client/solicitor concerns, but it also provides valuable feedback to the leaders of organizations who wish to monitor and improve customer service.

In an era of escalating costs for formal dispute resolution like litigation, the ombudsman model will find new areas of modern endeavour in which to function. The idea that citizens' concerns can be addressed through a flexible, expeditious third party review is an alternative for any organization wishing to enhance its relationship with important partners.

## Our Pan-Canadian Network

The OCR is part of a network of nine provincial and territorial ombudsman offices that regularly consult and assist one another on matters of mutual interest. No personal information is traded; rather, consultations revolve around policies in other provinces for purposes of research on best practices in government, and on internal policies or human resource issues relevant to ombudsman operations. Our national contacts often have quick access to the answers we seek, or can employ their network of contacts in their respective public services to find information. The OCR also interacts with our colleagues in Ottawa at both the Office of the Correctional Investigator and the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner in the same spirit of reciprocity.



### *Did you know...*

In 1974, the CBC introduced its bi-weekly TV program "Ombudsman" which concerned advocacy for citizens' rights in disputes with government or corporate bureaucracy. The show had a staff of fifteen researchers who investigated legitimate complaints of personal injustice and attempted to settle them. While only a few cases made it to air on the program, by 1978 the staff had managed to confront some twelve thousand cases from across Canada, of which thirty-six per cent (approximately 4,300) had been resolved. The show was cancelled in 1980. Source: Queen's University Film and Media ([www.film.queensu.ca](http://www.film.queensu.ca))

## Seeking Fairness

### Medical Needs Met – Adult Corrections Division, Department of Justice and Public Safety

An inmate who was being held for five months alleged that he received unfair treatment by staff of the West Coast Correctional Center in Stephenville as it related to proper medical attention and care. Specifically, he claimed that the lack of attention led to the exacerbation of his pre-existing back problem. A complete chronological review and detailed examina-

tion of his medical file showed that he had been provided with appropriate medical attention by correctional staff, and had been in hospital on numerous occasions. In addition, he had his meals brought to him, and had been transported to St. John's for surgery via ambulance to avoid having to sit in the regular prisoner transport vehicle. The record showed that he had access to a comprehensive health care service equivalent in quality to the health care available in the community.



## Finding Solutions

### I Can See Clearly Now – Service NL, Motor Vehicle Registration (“MVR”)

The OCR was contacted by a man who was advised he could not drive until he provided proof he had passed an eye exam. The man alleged that the initial written notice of this from MVR had been delivered to the wrong address, and the delay caused by the postal service mistake led to notification that his license was being suspended. The OCR contacted MVR on the man's behalf, and was advised he was actually required to file a routine medical report and had done so, however, the vision portion had been omitted. The second notification was sent to advise him of this, and that his family physician could vouch for his eye health; but, failure to do so would result in suspension. The element of misunderstanding and the postal hiccup were clarified. The man had the eye exam, the results of which led to the deletion of the suspension and return of his driving privileges.

#### We deliver!

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](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 *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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