



**Office of the Citizens'
Representative**

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

2023 – 2024

**Public Interest Disclosure
and Whistleblower
Protection Act**



**Province of Newfoundland
and Labrador**



Office of the Citizens' Representative
Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

May 2024

The Honourable Derek Bennett, MHA
Speaker of the House of Assembly
Confederation Building
St. John's, NL

Dear Mr. Speaker:

It is my duty and privilege to submit to the House of Assembly my Report on the activities of the Office of the Citizens' Representative under the **Public Interest Disclosure and Whistleblower Protection Act** ("the Act").

This Report is submitted under Section 20(1) of the Act, and covers the 2023-2024 Fiscal Year.

Yours truly,

Bradley J. Moss
Citizens' Representative

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Citizens' Representative Message



Bradley J. Moss

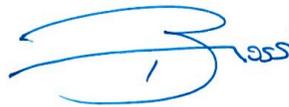
As Citizens' Representative, I am pleased to release this Annual Report on activities this Office has undertaken under the government-wide whistleblower program. This report is required under Section 20 of the **Public Interest Disclosure and Whistleblower Protection Act** ("the Act"), the purpose of which is to facilitate the disclosure and investigation of significant and serious matters in, or relating to the public service that an employee believes may be unlawful, dangerous to the public or injurious to the public interest. The Act is also designed to protect persons who make those disclosures.

OCR functions as an independent, non-partisan investigative and support Office for whistleblowers. The Office has the authority to receive and analyze whistleblower disclosures and it provides assistance by providing confidential advice, using publicly available resources and industry standard guidelines for handling whistleblower complaints. Matters that do not fit the internal test for jurisdiction, but could still constitute waste, fraud, abuse, or other illegal activity are not summarily dismissed, and may still be referred to the appropriate investigative body including the Auditor General or law enforcement. Select matters that do not meet the test can also be migrated over for investigation under the **Citizens' Representative Act**.

In our experience, some individuals do not call themselves "whistleblowers" and feel they are simply doing their jobs by bringing issues forward. A public servant does not need to self-identify as a whistleblower to be eligible for protection. Likewise, just because someone calls themselves a whistleblower does not mean their disclosure qualifies as protected whistleblowing under the Act. Nevertheless, anyone who ponders whether what they are witnessing in their workplace is wrongdoing is free to contact OCR confidentially to discuss the issue. Seeking advice is a protected activity and we do not disclose the identity of those who contact us.

Once a disclosure is analyzed and accepted for investigation, OCR continues to offer key safeguards, including confidential handling of disclosures, and independent reporting channels into Government. In addition to consulting with potential whistleblowers and making referrals this year, we provided information sessions to both the Department of Finance and the Office of the Auditor General to make them aware of the program and explain the process, outcomes, and benefits that come from employees who step forward to protect the provincial Government against wrongdoing. Each year, the Office participates in federal, provincial and territorial meetings where best practices in investigation, litigation and emerging trends in whistleblowing are discussed. We are happy to be in a position to host these meetings with our national colleagues in St. John's in the fall of 2024.

For more information on the Act, or to consider making a disclosure, visit our website at www.citizensrep.nl.ca or contact OCR. Our services are free and confidential.



Bradley J. Moss
Citizens' Representative

The Public Interest Disclosure and Whistleblower Protection Act

Citizens of our Province rely on public service employees to facilitate the provision of public services respectfully and equitably. Citizens also have an interest to be confident that the provincial government is following all statutory requirements, ensuring the safety of the people and the environment, and operating with openness and transparency by the appropriate and accountable use of public funds and assets.

Public servants are in a unique position to become aware of internal problems within government and its various agencies, boards and commissions. A public servant with information that could “blow the whistle” will be in a conflicting, often ethical dilemma for which the necessary protection may be the determining factor for bringing forward information in the public interest. It is critically important that a public servant is provided with a safe avenue to confidentially discuss potential disclosures, and receive impartial advice and support in the process of formalizing disclosure of sensitive information and documentation.

The **Public Interest Disclosure and Whistleblower Protection Act (PIDA)**:

- ❖ Provides the right to current employees to disclose concerns about suspected wrongdoings within their organization and the right to be protected from reprisal for doing so. These rights reinforce the key values of integrity and accountability in the public sector.
- ❖ Protects the identity of an employee making a disclosure, maintaining confidentiality to the extent permitted by law and consistent with the need to conduct a proper investigation.
- ❖ Provides an avenue for employees of the public service to come forward in a confidential manner with allegations of specific wrongdoing they believe should be investigated in a fair and effective manner and rectified in the public interest. The Citizens’ Representative, as an Officer of the House of Assembly, is independent of the provincial government, inclusive of all public bodies subject to the PIDA. They are free to reach their own conclusions of matters raised under the PIDA.
- ❖ Contains penalties, including job loss, against wrongdoers or any person who commits a reprisal against an employee suspected of disclosing in the public

interest. Misleading the Citizens' Representative or his investigators, or falsifying or destroying evidence is punishable under the PIDA, and can result in personal fines of up to \$10,000.

Departments and Public Bodies Covered by the PIDA

"Departments" are defined at Section 2(e) of the PIDA as:

- A department created under the **Executive Council Act** and includes a branch of the executive government of the province.

"Public Bodies" are defined at section 2(h) as:

- a corporation, the ownership of which or a majority of shares of which is vested in the Crown,
- a corporation, commission or body, the majority of the members of which, or a majority of the members of the board of directors of which are appointed by an Act, the Lieutenant Governor in Council or a minister;
- a school board or school district constituted or established under the **Schools Act (1997)**, including the Conseil Scolaire Francophone, and
- a corporation, commission or other body designated by regulation as a public body.

Memorial University has its own internal disclosure process and is exempt from investigation under the PIDA.

Employees and Members of the House of Assembly also have access to a process comparable to that under the PIDA. Any such disclosures or inquiries are referred for possible investigation under the **House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act**.

What is a “Wrongdoing”?

Wrongdoing is defined in Section 4(1) of the PIDA:

4. (1) This Act applies to the following wrongdoings in or relating to the public service:

- an act or omission constituting an offence under an Act of the Legislature or the Parliament of Canada, or a regulation made under an Act;
- an act or omission that creates a substantial and specific danger to the life, health or safety of persons, or to the environment, other than a danger that is inherent in the performance of the duties or functions of an employee;
- gross mismanagement, including of public funds or a public asset; and
- knowingly directing or counselling a person to commit a wrongdoing described in paragraph (a), (b) or (c).

What is “Gross Mismanagement”?

The PIDA does not specifically define gross mismanagement. This permits a flexible approach when assessing potential disclosures. Generally, the Citizens’ Representative will ask if the allegations, as stated, are proven, would they engage any of the following:

- matters of significant importance;
- serious errors that are not debatable among reasonable people;
- something more than a *de minimus*, or "one-off" wrongdoing or negligence;
- management action or inaction that creates a substantial risk of significant adverse impact upon the ability of an organization, office, or unit to carry out its mandate in the public interest;
- the deliberate nature of the wrongdoing; and
- the systemic nature of the wrongdoing.

Post-investigation, consideration of gross mismanagement would also be present in cases with credible evidence showing the application of management responsibilities in a manner grossly deviating from the standard of care or competence that a reasonable person would follow in the same situation.

Not all of these factors have to be present before a disclosure is accepted for investigation, and the existence of one of the factors alone may not constitute wrongdoing for the purposes of the PIDA.

In cases that don't meet these threshold tests, the Citizens' Representative will consider, in his discretion, investigating the matter via Section 15 of the **Citizens' Representative Act**, without a named individual. The resulting "Ombudsman own motion" investigation may go on to identify breach of duty or misconduct on behalf of a government employee.

Public Interest Disclosures

Public interest disclosures are required to be in writing pursuant to Section 8 of the PIDA. It will include a description of the wrongdoing, the name of the person(s) alleged to have committed the wrongdoing, the date of the wrongdoing, and whether the wrongdoing has already been disclosed. A written disclosure usually follows a period of inquiry, as previously described. In some cases, the completed forms and evidence arrive in a package, or via a solicitor.

OCR invests the time necessary to thoroughly analyze the evidence, clarify key allegations, or probe other areas that may not be covered in the written disclosure. It is beneficial to provide as much descriptive information as available when making a disclosure.



Office of the Citizens' Representative
Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

4th Floor, Bedford Building, 20 Crossie Place, P.O. Box 8400, St. John's, NL, A1B 3N7
Telephone: (709) 729-7647; Toll Free 1-800-559-0073; Facsimile: (709) 729-7696
E-mail: ocr@gov.nl.ca Website: www.citizensrep.nl.ca

Please complete and return to the Office of the Citizens' Representative at the address noted above.

Name: _____

Date of Birth: (MM/DD/YYYY) _____

(This information is being collected to ensure the protection of your personal information. It also allows our Office to capture anonymized statistical information for annual reporting and the identification of systemic trends.)

Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Alternate Phone: _____

Please indicate if it is appropriate to leave a voicemail at these numbers: Yes No

E-mail Address: _____

Electoral District: _____

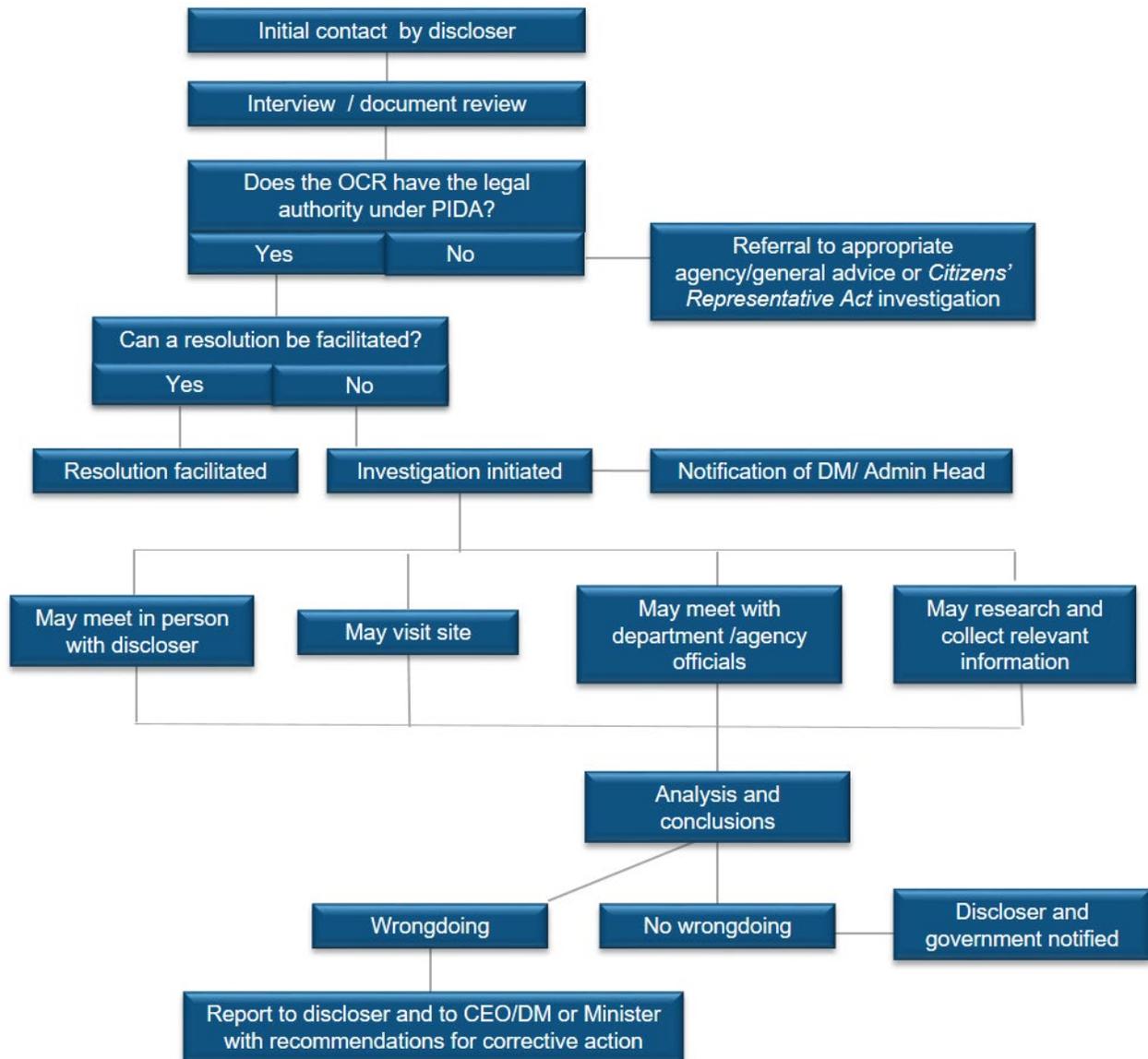
1. Which authority (government agency/department) is your complaint about? (Please identify by specific name)

2. Who have you dealt with? (List any names, titles, phone numbers or addresses that you have. If none, please state "None")

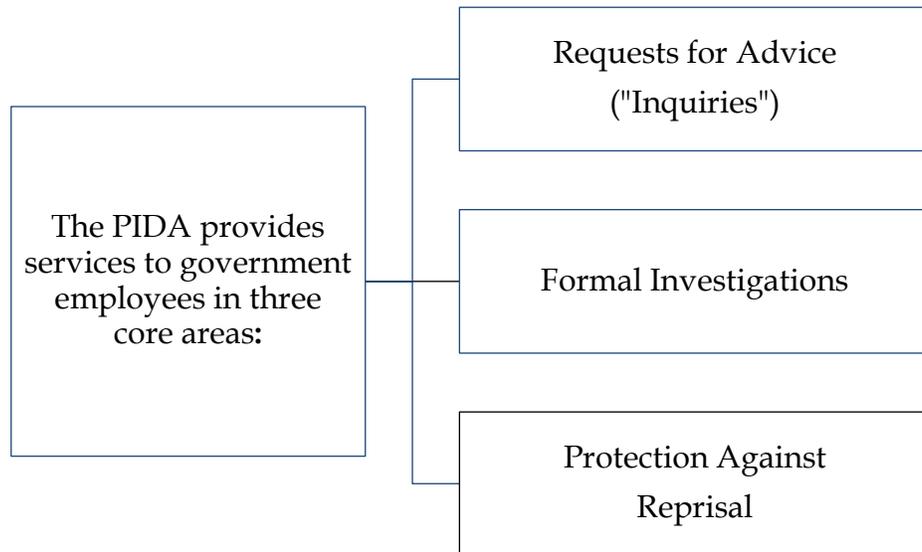
3. Summarize your complaint and any steps you have taken to try to resolve it. (Please indicate any file or reference numbers and relevant dates).

A written disclosure of wrongdoing that has *prima facie* merit, and is made by a government employee about a jurisdictional public body, is formally investigated under the PIDA. The investigation process is set out in the following chart.

The Disclosure Process



Services Provided Under PIDA



Requests for Advice ("Inquiries")

Section 6 of the PIDA states "an employee who is considering making a disclosure may request advice from the Citizens' Representative".

We consider the provision of advice and any communications prior to the registration of a formal written disclosure as an "inquiry", as anticipated in Section 20. In some cases, prospective disclosers are seeking information on:

- the blanket legal protections afforded by the PIDA;
- protections against the disclosure of their identity;
- how the investigative process works; or
- the best way to remedy their issue and discuss their dilemma.

In some cases, there are already collective bargaining, court, HR or quasi-judicial processes that are underway, that may be stalled, or recently concluded.

The PIDA cases differ from our normal Ombudsman work with the general public who are experiencing difficulties with the public service. Employees may be hesitant to formally engage the process, and desire anonymity in the initial stages until some measure of comfort is found with formally disclosing in writing.

The inquiry process may also require the employee to provide more concrete evidence of wrongdoing over and above simple allegations in order to provide a more solid basis for investigation. In some cases, the employee is in a state of crisis, depression, financial hardship, or feels victimized. Sometimes, periods of personal reflection exist between the initial provision of advice and a formal disclosure.



Formal Investigations

Disclosures received are investigated as informally and expeditiously as possible, as required by section 14 of the PIDA. This section also ensures the right to procedural fairness and natural justice to all persons involved in an investigation, including persons making disclosures, witnesses and persons alleged to be responsible for wrongdoings.

In situations wherein a disclosure may not meet the threshold for a wrongdoing under the PIDA, further assessment of the allegations may result in an investigation in a confidential manner under the Ombudsman legislation and process.

Section 13 of the PIDA provides the purpose of an investigation into a disclosure of wrongdoing as bringing the wrongdoing to the attention of the public body and recommending corrective measures that should be taken.

There may be occasions whereby a formal disclosure has not been submitted, yet the allegations informally brought forward remain of concern. In the situation where an informal disclosure gives the appearance of the allegations, if accurate, meeting the threshold of a wrongdoing, these allegations can be brought forward to the head of the public body for internal assessment to facilitate resolution within the public service. Any such action would be carried out in the public interest while maintaining protection for the identity of the whistleblower(s).

Protection Against Reprisal

A reprisal is specific action taken against an employee who either comes forward with allegations, seeks advice, or is a witness who participates in an investigation. Reprisals are prohibited under the PIDA.

Reprisals are defined in Section 2(j) as:

- discipline;
- a demotion;
- termination of employment;
- a measure that adversely affects his or her employment or working conditions; or
- a threat to take any of the above measures.

Reprisals fall within the jurisdiction of the Newfoundland and Labrador Labour Relations Board. Under the PIDA, upon receipt of a reprisal allegation, the Board must consider whether one or more of the Section 2(j) measures has been taken against an employee because he or she has, in good faith, sought advice about making a disclosure; made a disclosure; or cooperated in an investigation.

Upon finding convincing evidence of a reprisal the Board may order that a person:

- be permitted to return to his or her duties;
- be reinstated or have damages paid where the Board considers that the trust relationship between the parties cannot be restored;
- receive compensation for lost wages that would have been paid but for the reprisal;
- receive compensation for expenses or other financial losses incurred as a direct result of the reprisal.

In addition, the Board may:

- order that the activity that constitutes the reprisal cease;
- order that the situation resulting from the reprisal be rectified; and,
- order that a person “do or refrain from doing anything in order to remedy a consequence of the reprisal.

Section 20(1) of the PIDA requires specific reporting by the Citizens' Representative in six areas of activity.

Allegations of Wrongdoing

4 {
• Allegations of wrongdoing 2023-2024

0 {
• Formal investigations under PIDA

We considered allegations from four (4) individuals under the PIDA during 2023-2024. In situations where formal disclosures are not received, the allegations are considered as inquiries for reporting purposes.

Of interest, the OCR is also responsible for public interest disclosures under Part VI of the **House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act** (HOAAIAA). While there is no obligation to report these statistics under the PIDA, it is worthy to note that we considered one (1) allegation under the HOAAIAA, separate and apart from those received under the PIDA.

Results for April 1, 2023, through March 31, 2024, are addressed in the following tables as they appear in Section 20.

Table 1 – The PIDA Section 20 Compliance Results

The PIDA Subsection	Results
20(1)(a): Number of inquiries relating to the PIDA.	4
20(1)(b): Number of disclosures received and number acted on and not acted on.	Of the 4 inquiries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0 written disclosures received; ▪ 4 potential disclosers were provided advice; ▪ 1 potential discloser was referred to the Human Rights Commission; ▪ 1 potential disclosure did not meet the definition of wrongdoing;
20(1)(c): Number of investigations commenced under the PIDA.	0 investigations commenced under the PIDA.
20(1)(d): Number of recommendations the Citizens' Representative has made and whether the department or public body has complied with the recommendation.	0 during FY 2023-2024
20(1)(e): Whether, in the opinion of the Citizens' Representative, there are any systemic problems that give rise to wrongdoings.	N/A
20(1)(f): The recommendations for improvement that the Citizens' Representative considers appropriate.	N/A

**Table 2 – Inquiries and Disclosures Received
April 1, 2023 – March 31, 2024**

The PIDA Subsection	Inquiry / Disclosure	Status / Disposition
4(1)(a) an act or omission constituting an offence under an Act of the Legislature or the Parliament of Canada, or a regulation made under an Act.	N/A	N/A
4(1)(b) an act or omission that creates a substantial and specific danger to the life, health or safety of persons, or to the environment, other than a danger that is inherent in the performance of the duties or functions of an employee.	N/A	N/A
4(1)(c) gross mismanagement, including of public funds or a public asset.	1) Inquiry re: gross mismanagement. 2) Inquiry re: gross mismanagement. 3) Inquiry re: gross mismanagement. 4) Inquiry re: gross mismanagement.	Provision of advice. Potential disclosure did not meet the definition of wrongdoing. Provision of advice. Potential discloser referred to the Human Rights Commission. Provision of advice. Provision of advice. Potential discloser referred to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate.
4(1)(d) knowingly directing or counselling a person to commit a wrongdoing described in paragraph (a), (b) or (c).	N/A	N/A

There were no investigations commenced under the PIDA during the fiscal year 2023-2024.

In each of these situations, disclosers were provided with advice in relation to the managing and the appropriate outlet for their allegations, in addition to anonymity reprisal protection provisions under the PIDA.





Contact Information:

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