



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

About the Ombudsman of Ontario and our services

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About the Ombudsman of Ontario and our services

What is an ombudsman?



An ombudsman is an independent official who investigates complaints from the public about problems in government administration.

The Ombudsman is a democratic institution, not a government department, and an essential element in states based on democracy, the rule of law, good administration and respect for rights.

The word “ombudsman” is Swedish. It is gender-neutral and it means “citizen’s representative.” The first parliamentary ombudsman was created in Sweden in 1809. Today, more than 100 countries around the world have independent ombudsman offices.

What is the Ombudsman of Ontario?



The Office of the Ombudsman of Ontario (more commonly called the Ombudsman of Ontario or the Ontario Ombudsman) was established in 1975, under the [Ombudsman Act](#). The Ombudsman is an impartial officer of the Ontario Legislature. The Ombudsman is not a government department, and is independent of the government and all political parties. The Ombudsman is appointed by an all-party committee of the Legislative Assembly every five years.

The current Ombudsman of Ontario is [Mr. Paul Dubé](#), who began his term on April 1, 2016. Ombudsman Dubé was appointed for a second term beginning on April 1, 2021.

Learn more about [the history of the Office of the Ontario Ombudsman](#).

What does the Ontario Ombudsman do and what can the Office take complaints about?



We make sure people are treated fairly by Ontario government and public services. We take complaints about more than 1,000 government and public sector organizations. These include:

- Provincial ministries and programs
- Crown corporations
- Administrative tribunals
- Agencies, boards and commissions
- Child protection services
- Cities, towns and municipalities
- French language services
- School boards, including provincial and demonstration schools
- Universities, colleges and other post-secondary programs

We handle more than 30,000 cases every year.

We can also investigate broader system-wide problems in Ontario government services and make recommendations to improve them.

Find out more about [what we can help you with](#).

What kinds of complaints or issues can't the Office take complaints about?



We do not take sides. We are neutral and impartial when helping to resolve a complaint. We cannot give legal advice and we do not represent individuals in legal proceedings. In addition, we do not take complaints about:

- Individual people
- Private businesses
- Legal disputes
- Criminal activity
- Judges and courts
- Politicians and elected officials at the provincial or federal levels
- Local, provincial or First Nations police services (except some Ontario Provincial Police administrative matters)
- The federal government and its departments and agencies
- Hospitals and long-term care homes (except those designated under the *French Language Services Act*)
- Matters that can be brought to the Toronto Ombudsman

We cannot issue orders or reverse decisions made by politicians.

What powers does the Ontario Ombudsman have?



The Ombudsman resolves complaints about government and public sector organizations. The Ombudsman can launch formal investigations into complaints or broader system-wide problems in government and public sector services and make recommendations to improve them.

Most complaints we receive are resolved through our early resolution process. We rarely launch a formal investigation into a complaint – we may do this when we have tried many times to resolve the complaint through our early resolution process or when the Ombudsman identifies a broader system-wide problem.

The *Ombudsman Act* lists the Ombudsman's powers of investigation. These include the authority to require individuals to provide information to our Office for an investigation, request documents from government and public sector organizations, collect evidence, and inspect buildings and other public spaces such as jails.

Government and public sector organizations must co-operate with our investigations. It is an offence under the Ombudsman Act to mislead the Ombudsman or to obstruct an investigation.

The Ombudsman rarely has to use these powers because government and public sector organizations are generally very co-operative when we request information and documents or visit public spaces as part of an investigation.

Can the Ontario Ombudsman help me with my problem?



We take complaints about more than 1,000 government and public sector organizations. These include:

- Provincial ministries and programs

- Crown corporations
- Administrative tribunals
- Agencies, boards and commissions
- Child protection services
- Cities, towns and municipalities
- French language services
- School boards, including provincial and demonstration schools
- Universities, colleges and other post-secondary programs

See the list of [organizations you can complain about](#).

If you can't find an organization on that list, or if you aren't sure if we can take your complaint, please [contact us](#). We'll help you figure out where to turn next.

Who can complain to the Ontario Ombudsman? Does it cost anything to complain?



Anyone can complain and it's free.

What can I expect if I complain to the Ontario Ombudsman?



We can help:

- See if the process, decisions and treatment were fair in your case
- Put you in touch with the right people if another office or agency can help with your complaint or problem
- Connect you to services, programs and resources to match your needs – including options you may not have thought of
- Treat urgent complaints quickly – such as if there is an immediate health or safety concern

On a bigger scale, we can make recommendations to:

- Change unfair policies
- Improve poor service
- Initiate major changes to public services to benefit millions of people

We strive to help you in any way we can, however, we do not take sides. We are neutral and impartial. We also cannot give legal advice or legal representation.

Explore real-life examples of our work:

How we help Ontarians: Case stories

How we help make public services better for Ontarians

When should I contact the Ontario Ombudsman?



You can contact us if you have a complaint or an issue that you haven't been able to resolve. Even if you're not sure whether you're ready to file a complaint, [contact us](#) and we'll help you figure out your next steps.

What do I need to do before I file a complaint?



1. Try to solve the problem by contacting the organization. All organizations should have a complaint process. Share your concerns with them. If you are not sure how to do this, you can ask the organization directly, or [contact us](#) and we can help you find out.
 2. Collect information and documents:
 - Names and titles of people you spoke to or emailed
 - When you contacted them (dates)
 - What they told you (notes or copies of emails)
 3. [File your complaint](#) using our online complaint form, by email, by phone, by regular mail, or in person by appointment.
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How can I file my complaint?



You can [file your complaint](#) here using our online complaint form, by email, by phone, by regular mail, or in person by appointment.

Can I make an anonymous complaint? Do I have to give my name?



In most cases, when you contact us with a complaint or an issue, our staff ask for your name and other relevant information. However, complaints are handled confidentially, and your name or the details of your case will not be shared without your consent. There is no public access to the information collected by the Ombudsman, and the Ombudsman is not subject to access-to-information legislation.

If I call your Office, will the phone call be recorded?



Yes. Calls may be recorded for quality assurance and training purposes and/or to ensure an accurate record.

Will the Ombudsman handle my case personally?



No. When you contact us with a complaint or an issue, it will be dealt with by the Ombudsman's staff, not the Ombudsman directly. Our staff are experts at resolving complaints and helping you figure out where to turn next.

Can the Ontario Ombudsman decline to review my complaint?



Yes. We can choose not to review a complaint, for example if:

- The issue is not current
 - The issue is outside the scope of what we can help with
 - The person who is complaining is not personally affected by the problem
 - There are alternative solutions to the problem
 - The complaint involves broad public policy rather than administrative issues
 - The complaint is frivolous or vexatious
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What happens after I file a complaint?



Our staff will contact you, if needed, for more information. We strive to resolve your complaint as quickly as possible using our early resolutions process. In some cases, we may have to do more research or request information from the organization you're complaining about. In rare cases, we may launch an investigation. We carry out our work confidentially and only disclose your information with your consent. We will keep you updated on the progress of your complaint and inform you about the outcome.

What does it take for the Ontario Ombudsman to launch a formal investigation?



We can decide to launch a formal investigation if:

- An individual complaint is very complicated or requires more work to resolve
- We see a trend in complaints about a specific issue

- We identify what appears to be a broader system-wide problem that could affect many people (we can do this even without receiving a single complaint; this is called an “own motion” investigation)

What happens in a formal investigation?



When we launch a formal investigation, we:

- Notify the public sector organization in writing
- Request documents
- Interview people at the public sector organization or other people involved
- May visit the public sector organization or relevant locations

At the end of the investigation, the Ombudsman often writes a report with findings and recommendations to address problems. When this happens, we provide the report to the public sector organization for its response. The feedback is taken into consideration and a final version of the report is prepared. The Ombudsman may release the report and the recommendations publicly. In some cases, the Ombudsman may opt to write a letter to the public sector organization instead of a report.

Does the Ontario Ombudsman make the results of his investigation public?



Not always. The results of investigations into broader system-wide problems are usually published as investigation reports which are made public. The results of investigations or reviews of individual complaints are sometimes anonymized and published in our Annual Reports.

Does the Ontario Ombudsman investigate and report on every complaint?



No. Formal investigations are rare. Most complaints we receive are resolved without a formal investigation. Statistics for all complaints and the outcomes of some complaints are published in our Annual Reports.

Does the Ontario Ombudsman inform government and public sector organizations about every complaint about them?



No. However, in some instances, we might share other complaint information with government and public sector organizations. For example:

1. If our staff need to gather information to resolve an individual complaint, they will share certain details about the complaint as necessary, with the consent of the person who made the complaint. (However, individual complaints are often resolved without ever having to contact the government or public sector organization.)
2. When we launch a formal investigation, we give written notice to the government or public sector organization, and this might include mention of complaint trends or certain complaint details.
3. On request, we provide government and public sector organizations with high-level information about the complaints we've received about them, including general trends and common complaint areas to help them improve their policies and services.

Can the Ontario Ombudsman force government and public sector organizations to change?



No. We cannot force government and public sector organizations to implement our suggestions or recommendations for change. However, most of our recommendations are accepted, and we track and report on an organization's progress in implementing them.

The Ombudsman cannot issue orders, reverse decisions made by politicians, or reverse decisions of public sector bodies such as tribunals or courts.

How does the Ontario Ombudsman make sure his recommendations for change are implemented?



When a government or public sector organization accepts our recommendations, we ask it to report to us on its progress in implementing them. We monitor this progress and publish updates in our [Annual Reports](#).

What if I have a complaint about an administrative tribunal?



If you believe you were not treated fairly by an administrative tribunal, you may [file a formal complaint](#). Where the Ombudsman finds that an individual was not treated fairly, he may make recommendations to the tribunal to address the problem. The Ombudsman may also make recommendations to address any underlying problems related to Ontario government legislation, policies or programs applicable to the tribunal. Learn more about that here: [Administrative Tribunals | Ombudsman Ontario](#).

Where can I complain if I am not happy with the service provided by the Ontario Ombudsman?



Learn more here about [how to submit feedback or a complaint about our service](#).

How big is the Ontario Ombudsman's office and what is its budget?



Our budget in 2024-2025 was \$33.10 million. Actual spending was \$30.09 million. Unspent funds are returned to the provincial treasury each year. Travel and hospitality expenses are published quarterly.

What does the Ontario Ombudsman do during a provincial election?



During the campaign period leading up to a provincial election, the Ontario Ombudsman and other Officers of the Legislature remain on the job. We take and review complaints as usual, and our ongoing investigations continue. However, we are aware that the Ontario public service is in a “caretaker” role during an election period, and major policy changes are unlikely. We do not release investigation reports or Annual Reports until after the election.

Services for children and youth

What does the Ontario Ombudsman's Children and Youth Unit do and what does it take complaints about?



The Ontario Ombudsman's Children and Youth Unit can take complaints from any young person or adult about child protection services, such as children's aid societies, Indigenous child and family well-being agencies, foster homes and group homes, secure treatment programs and youth custody facilities.

- We will listen, answer questions and find out what happened and try to fix the problem.
- We can provide information about your rights , investigate problems, connect you with others who can help, and more.
- We also take complaints about many other public bodies that affect young people, such as school boards, colleges and universities, and developmental services.

Read examples of [how we help young people](#).

What can I expect if I complain to the Children and Youth Unit?



We will answer your questions and let you know how we can help. Our staff are experts in dealing with child protection agencies and services. It's free to [contact us](#)!

What will change for me if I complain?



Let us know what the problem is. We can get answers. We can find out if you are being treated fairly, put you in touch with others who can help, or suggest ways to fix the problem. Depending on what we find out, the Ontario Ombudsman might even conduct an investigation and make recommendations that could help you and many other young people.

When should I contact the Children and Youth Unit?



Contact the Children and Youth Unit if you have a question or a problem with a children's aid society, a foster home or group home, a secure treatment program or youth custody facility.

Is the Ontario Ombudsman my advocate? Will people at the Children and Youth Unit take my side?



The Ontario Ombudsman and our staff are not advocates. We do not take sides when we look into a complaint. But we can give you information about your rights, find out what caused the problem, recommend ways to fix it, and make sure you are treated fairly.

Can I complain by phone? Email? On social media?



Yes, you can complain by phone. You can also use email, fill out a form on our website, or even make your complaint by regular mail or in person. [View our contact info](#). Please do **not** complain through our Facebook, Twitter or Instagram accounts, because posts there are not private.

Can an adult file a complaint for me?



Yes, a parent, caregiver or any other adult can contact the Children and Youth Unit for you, but we might need to get more information from you about your complaint.

Will contacting your Office get me in trouble?



No, everyone has the right to contact the Ontario Ombudsman. Young people in care have the right to contact us privately without delay. If you experience any troubles, let us know immediately by phone, email or in person.

If I call your Office, will the phone call be recorded?



Yes, we record some phone calls, but we keep the recordings private.

What happens after I file a complaint?



We will contact you for more information. We might ask you whether you have already complained to anyone about the problem, and what happened. We might contact the organization and the people you are complaining about. We will try to resolve the problem as quickly as possible, and we will let you know the outcome.

Does the Ontario Ombudsman investigate every complaint?



No. Most of the time, we help people without having to do an investigation. The Ontario Ombudsman does not have to look into a complaint if it is outdated, or not serious, or about something that is not part of his job (for example, if it is something outside of Ontario).

Can the Ontario Ombudsman force an agency to fix my problem or make changes?



All government bodies and agencies must answer our questions and co-operate with our investigations. But the Ontario Ombudsman cannot force them to make changes. He makes recommendations, which means he suggests ways to fix the problem. Most of the time, the government body or agency makes the changes that the Ombudsman recommends.

School boards

What kinds of school board issues can the Ontario Ombudsman help with?



We can help with school board issues such as:

- Registration
- Busing
- Discipline
- Special education

- Early childhood education and daycare
- Closed school board meetings

We cannot:

- Reverse decisions of politicians
- Take complaints about:
 - Private schools
 - Teachers or other self-regulated professions

Learn more about [how we can help resolve school board issues](#), or see the [list of organizations you can complain about](#).

If you can't find an organization on that list, or if you aren't sure if we can take your complaint, please [contact us](#). We'll help you figure out where to turn next.

Explore real-life examples of [how we have helped resolve school board issues](#).

What should I do if I have a complaint about a school or school board?



You should try to resolve your complaint directly with the school board first. You may wish to discuss your concerns with a teacher, vice-principal or principal. If that does not resolve the matter, you may wish to speak with a school board superintendent or other school board official.

If you are unable to resolve your concerns by taking these steps, or you aren't sure who to speak to, you can [contact us](#).

What should I do if I have a complaint about busing or transportation?



You should try to resolve your complaint directly with the bus driver or school staff first. If that does not resolve the matter, you can check the school board's website to see if there is a complaint process for busing and transportation services. In some cases, school boards have superintendents who are responsible for transportation services, while in others, school boards provide busing and transportation through a third-party consortium. You should try to bring your complaint to the superintendent or the third-party consortium, depending on which one applies to your school board.

If you are unable to resolve your concerns by taking these steps, or you aren't sure who to speak to, you can [contact us](#).

What should I do if I have a complaint about special education services?




You should discuss your concerns with your child's teacher and principal first. If that does not resolve your concerns, you may wish to raise them with the superintendent responsible for your child's school or a superintendent responsible for special education at the school board,

If you are unable to resolve your concerns by taking these steps, or you aren't sure who to speak to, you can [contact us](#).

What should I do if I have a complaint about student suspensions or expulsions?




Review the [Ministry of Education's information on suspensions and expulsions](#)  and follow the Ministry's appeal process first before making a complaint to our Office. Notices of suspensions and expulsions should contain information on how to make an appeal.

However, if you are having trouble getting information about the appeal process, or if you still have concerns after appealing a decision, you can [contact us](#).

What should I do if I have a complaint about a teacher?



You may wish to discuss your concerns with the teacher directly or speak to the principal first. You may wish to raise your concerns with the school board after that if necessary.

Teachers are regulated by the Ontario College of Teachers. The College's website explains its [complaint process](#) .

If you are unable to resolve your concerns by taking these steps, or you aren't sure who to speak to, you can [contact us](#).

What happens if the school board I work for or represent is the subject of a complaint to the Ontario Ombudsman?



We may contact an employee or representative of a school board, inform them we have received a complaint and request information from them as we work to resolve the problem.

If we are conducting a formal investigation, we will notify the school board in writing and give it a chance to respond. School board representatives, officials, and staff may also be interviewed and asked to provide information that is relevant to the complaint.

For the integrity of our process, we determine which officials we need to contact and/or interview.

What should I do if I am an employee of a school or school board and want to complain to the Ontario Ombudsman?

The Ontario Ombudsman does not replace the roles of public sector unions or grievance processes, or interfere in collective bargaining. Employment-related matters should be directed to the relevant union officials or managers first. If you have concerns about wrongdoing at a school or school board, [contact us](#) to see if we can help. Complaints are confidential. We will not disclose your identity to anyone without your consent.

Colleges, universities and other post-secondary programs

What kinds of college, university and post-secondary issues can the Ontario Ombudsman help with?

We can help with college, university and post-secondary issues such as:

- Admissions
- Tuition/fees
- Financial aid
- Grade disputes
- Trespass notices

We cannot:

- Reverse decisions of politicians
- Take complaints about:
 - Private universities
 - Educators, teachers or teaching staff, or professors
 - Student unions

Learn more about [how we can help resolve post-secondary issues](#) , or see the [list of organizations you can complain about](#).

If you can't find an organization on that list, or if you aren't sure if we can take your complaint, please [contact us](#). We'll help you figure out where to turn next.

Explore real-life examples of [how we have helped resolve college, university and post-secondary issues](#).

What should I do if my complaint is about a college or university?




You should try to resolve your complaint directly with the college or university first. This can include making an appeal through an available appeal mechanism, or bringing a complaint to the college's or university's ombudsman if there is one.

If you are unable to resolve your concerns by taking these steps, or you aren't sure who to speak to, you can [contact us](#).

The *Ombudsman Act* states that the Ombudsman shall consider the application of the principles of academic freedom when considering a complaint about a university.

What should I do if my complaint is about financial aid?



You should try and resolve your complaint directly with your institution's financial aid office. If you are unable to resolve the complaint, you can contact the [Student Financial Assistance Branch at the Ministry of Colleges and Universities](#) .

If you are still unable to resolve your concerns by taking these steps, or you aren't sure who to speak to, you can [contact us](#).

What should I do if my complaint is about the student union or student government?



The Ontario Ombudsman does not have authority over student unions, which are typically governed by representatives elected by the student body. If you have a complaint about a student union, you should raise your concerns with the student union directly.

What happens if the college or university I work for or represent is the subject of a complaint to the Ontario Ombudsman?



We may contact an employee or representative of a college, university or post-secondary institution, inform them we have received a complaint and request information from them as we work to resolve the problem.

If we are conducting a formal investigation, we will notify the institution in writing and give it a chance to respond. Institution representatives, officials, and staff may also be interviewed and asked to provide information that is relevant to the complaint.

For the integrity of our process, we determine which officials we need to contact and/or interview.

What should I do if I am an employee of a college or university and want to complain to the Ontario Ombudsman?



The Ontario Ombudsman does not replace the roles of public sector unions or grievance processes, or interfere in collective bargaining. Employment-related matters should be directed to the relevant union officials or managers first. If you have concerns about wrongdoing at a college or university, [contact us](#) to see if we can help. Complaints are confidential. We will not disclose your identity to anyone without your consent.

Towns, cities and municipalities

What kinds of town, city and municipal issues can the Ontario Ombudsman help with?



We can help with issues in your town, city or municipality such as:

- Access to public housing
- By-law enforcement
- Council meetings that are closed to the public
- Mistakes in electricity or water bills
- Ontario Works
- Services like garbage collection or snow removal

We cannot:

- Reverse decisions of politicians
- Take complaints about:
 - The conduct of elected officials
 - Library boards
 - Municipal police services and police service boards
 - Matters handled by the Toronto Ombudsman

Learn more about [how we can help resolve town, city and municipal issues](#), or see the [list of organizations you can complain about](#).

If you can't find an organization on that list, or if you aren't sure if we can take your complaint, please [contact us](#). We'll help you figure out where to turn next.

Explore real-life examples of [how we have helped resolve town, city and municipal issues](#).

What should I do if I have a complaint about a town, city or municipality?



You should try to resolve your complaint directly with your town, city or municipality first by either contacting staff or an official, or following the complaint process if there is one.

If you are unable to resolve your concerns by taking these steps, or you aren't sure how to raise your complaint, you can [contact us](#).

What should I do if I have a complaint about the conduct of a councillor or mayor?





You should file your complaint with the integrity commissioner in your town, city or municipality. If you need help finding out who that is, [contact us](#) and we can help you.

What should I do if I have a complaint about local police service?




We cannot take complaints about municipal or First Nations police services or police service boards.

If you have a complaint about the conduct of a police officer, you may wish to contact the [Law Enforcement Complaints Agency](#) .

For concerns about a police service's compliance with the *Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019* and its regulations, a chief of police's procedures, policies of a police board or the Solicitor General, or the conduct of a police board member, you may want to contact the [Inspectorate of Policing](#) .

What should I do if I have a complaint about the City of Toronto?



We cannot take complaints about matters handled by the Toronto Ombudsman. If your complaint relates to the City of Toronto, you can [contact the Toronto Ombudsman](#) .

What should I do if I have a complaint about my local integrity commissioner, auditor general, ombudsman, or similar local



accountability officer?

We do not replace or redo the work of local accountability officers. However, once they have completed their work on a complaint or issue, or if they have declined to look at it, we can review their process.

What should I do if I have a complaint about a meeting of my local council, a local board, or one of its committees that was closed to the public?



If you have a complaint about a closed meeting, you should contact the closed meeting investigator for your town, city or municipality. You can [find out who the closed meeting investigator is for your area](#).

The Ontario Ombudsman is the closed meeting investigator for more than half of the province's towns, cities and municipalities. If your town, city or municipality uses the Ontario Ombudsman as its closed meeting investigator, you can [file your complaint](#).

What happens if the municipality I work for or represent is the subject of a complaint to the Ontario Ombudsman?



We may contact an employee or representative of a municipality, inform them we have received a complaint and request information from them as we work to resolve the problem. We contact the person at the municipality with knowledge of the issue.

If we are conducting a formal investigation, we will notify the municipality in writing and give it a chance to respond. Municipal representatives, officials, and staff may also be interviewed and asked to provide information that is relevant to the complaint.

For the integrity of our process, we determine which officials we need to contact and/or interview.

What should I do if I am an employee of a municipality and want to complain to the Ontario Ombudsman?



The Ontario Ombudsman does not replace the roles of public sector unions or grievance processes, or interfere in collective bargaining. Employment-related matters should be directed to the relevant union officials or managers first. If you have concerns about wrongdoing at a municipality, [contact us](#) to see if we can help. Complaints are confidential. We will not disclose your identity to anyone without your consent.

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