



## Citizens' Representative's Message

So, what's in a name? Recently, our Office completed an extensive investigation concerning a citizen's complaint against a large government department. The investigation took six months to conclude and involved a review of extensive records and the conduct of significant research. As per our protocols, we kept the citizen advised of the progress of the investigation. With the exception of a few instances where the Department did not communicate in a timely fashion, we concluded that it treated the citizen with fairness, respect and a desire to reach an optimal solution for him.

When we communicated with the citizen the outcome of our investigation, he responded by stating that he was not satisfied with the result and protested that we were not "representing" him as our name suggests. Despite our best efforts to inform citizens about our role as an ombudsman, i.e., we conduct independent third party reviews of public administration, we are continuously encumbered by the expectation created by the name of our Office.

In a 2010 review of our legislation conducted by our Office, we recommended that our name be changed to reflect the true nature of our role. The Review can be found on our website under Publications - Review Documents. Other jurisdictions in Canada use either Ombudsman, or in the case of British Columbia, Ombudsperson. The Ombudsman moniker is also widely recognized internationally in both the private and public sectors. It may be time to reconsider our Office's name.

## Huddling Up – Our Designate Meetings Continue

Under our current Activity Plan we have committed to promoting the use of collaboration and mediation with departments and agencies that experience higher complaint volumes; not necessarily as a result of poor service or decision making, but as a result of the large number of daily transactions the department or agency may have with the public. During the last three months we have met with eight departments and agencies to discuss the past year's complaints in the interest of spotting trends or problem areas that may require attention. The meetings were also used as an opportunity to discuss ways to streamline our processes to reduce the time it takes to settle complaints outside of the formal investigative process.

## Did you know?

In the last reporting year (2015) we considered 798 matters brought forward by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians under the *Citizens' Representative Act*. Thirty years ago, reporting on the year 1985 – former NL Ombudsman Ambrose Peddle considered 520 matters under his governing legislation. While today we report on complaints received by electoral district, Mr. Peddle recorded "Source of Complaints by Community and Number of Complaints From Each."

### Seeking Fairness

The Department of Advanced Education and Skills (AES) works with local transportation companies to assist clients who require transportation to approved medical appointments. A taxi owner who contacted us reporting unfair and unreasonable delays for reimbursement of his fares. We



investigated and undertook a detailed review of the services rendered and payments received, together with interviews of public servants with knowledge of the system and the individual file. We reported our findings and, following a period of review and consideration by AES, he received a payment of \$11,119.20.

### Finding Solutions

A lady who tried to register her vehicle online encountered a glitch at that important moment when online payment is being processed. Unable to complete the transaction, unsure if she could drive her vehicle, and feeling lost when told the employee responsible for fixing the problem went off on leave, she proceeded to a bank to pay the fee. When OCR looked into the matter, both the online and bank payments had gone through. To MRD's credit she was given an apology and the second fee was applied to another vehicle she had that was coming due for registration.



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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