

**For Immediate Release**

## **Ombudsman issues 2012 Annual Report**

**Toronto – February 14th, 2013**

The City of Toronto Ombudsman Fiona Crean says residents, politicians and staff are gaining a clearer understanding about the benefits of having an independent Ombudsman to investigate problems with City services and programs.

The Ombudsman noted there has been some confusion about her role, usually after she has issued controversial investigation reports. Some politicians have challenged her independence and questioned her role.

“Having an ombudsman in Toronto is a relatively recent experience,” says Crean, “so it is not surprising there is confusion about my role. There has been some resistance from city staff but generally there has been good cooperation from the public service.”

Crean believes that mutual understanding and acceptance will grow “as the office demonstrates its capacity for making significant contributions to improved service. An independent and properly funded Ombudsman is a sign of good government.”

The Ombudsman says, despite its relative youth, her office can point to a number of successes. “More than half of the 160 recommendations made since my office opened advocated systemic change and cross-city fixes. All of them have been accepted.”

“While my office’s focus may be systemic, we also help residents solve irritating and disturbing problems when they come up.”

- Ms. B is a senior who lives in a rent-geared-to-income unit run by Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC). When she returned from a hospital stay, TCHC told her it was eliminating her rent subsidy because there were documents missing from her file. It withdrew more than \$900 for rent from her bank account, leaving it empty.

Despite the intervention of a legal clinic, TCHC continued to ask Ms. B for the “missing documents” and sent her a second request for overdue rent of more than \$1,000. After the Ombudsman intervened, TCHC rescinded the 300% rent increase; the Ombudsman told TCHC officials how frightening their actions were for a vulnerable senior.

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- Mr. H was renovating his home, and had to leave a security deposit with the City's Transportation Services in case city property, such as the sidewalk, was damaged. When the work was finished, he was told he would receive a cheque for \$1,999 in four to six weeks.

When the cheque failed to arrive, he called the Ombudsman's office. Transportation Services said they would send the file for refund that day. Ten days later, Mr. H called again, because no cheque had appeared. It arrived two days after the last call.

The Office of the Ombudsman addressed 1430 complaints in 2012. Six of those became systemic reviews of city programs and services. Similar to a year ago, the most common complaints were about poor communications, delays and inadequate service, unpredictable enforcement, and unfair decisions.

Most of the complaints involved the Municipal Licensing & Standards and Revenue Services divisions at the City, and the Toronto Community Housing Corporation.

**For more information or to arrange interviews, contact:**

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*Toronto's Ombudsman is an impartial and independent officer of City Council, providing an appeal of last resort for people who feel they have been adversely affected by a decision, act or omission of City Administration. The Ombudsman also undertakes investigations into systemic problems that cause equitable, substantial and procedural unfairness in City administration.*