

**Speaking Notes**  
**Presentation to Budget Committee**  
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## Introduction

As an instrument of the *City of Toronto Act*, we are an independent Office of last resort for residents to complain about City services - a small but key component of the City's drive to deliver excellent service and be accountable to its residents.

My Office is new, just 20 months old, and still in roll out phase. We are a tiny start-up organization, and cannot be compared to organizations which have operated for years. Recognizing the imperatives of the City's fiscal challenges, I requested a budget for my start-up year that was modest, incremental and cautious as we determined the need for our services.

We now know very clearly that our budget does not meet the needs to serve residents effectively. My staff and I work long hours to meet the highest levels of customer service, but we can neither sustain this nor do more with the means that we have now. Neither does our start-up budget allow us to meet our full mandate under the *City of Toronto Act*.

You should also bear in mind that in times of public service restraint, demands on an ombudsman always increase.

## Highlights: 2010 Results

Our first full fiscal year of operation completed. As of December 2010:

- 1,562 complaints – 98% processed and closed
- 9 investigations completed; 5 of these were systemic investigations
- First annual report tabled in January 2010
  
- First of three year strategic plan successfully completed
- We issued two publications

While we raised the Office profile, we are still not reaching many areas of the city and therefore, roll-out is not complete.

## Snapshot of Complaints by City Ward

The challenges and service gaps are glaring. Most complaints to my Office come from those residents living on the Bloor/Yonge axis in the downtown core of the city. The Office is far better known to the affluent homeowner who has the knowledge and skills to complain than the single parent from Thorncliffe working the night shift or the Malvern resident who has two jobs to keep the family together. But most of the city's population don't live downtown.

You can see that the 7 wards combined of the Budget Committee members, for example, only represent 4.5% of the complaints to my Office. Almost all of Toronto's low-income and blue collar neighbourhoods are outside the core of the city. These are the residents most likely to face barriers to equitable access to the City's programs and services.

Neighbourhoods outside the downtown core have a higher than average proportion of working poor, blue collar workers, immigrants and newcomers, people with no knowledge of English, and high numbers of people with disabilities. This equals precarious employment, health, childcare and other circumstances, which reduce people's opportunity to learn what an ombudsman is, let alone submit a complaint.

Leaving the onus on individual Torontonians to find out about the Ombudsman is unacceptable, unfair and a barrier to accountable public service. The unsettling truth is that those most likely to be in need of an ombudsman are the ones least likely to know about the services, and are often not in a position to find us easily.

These residents, whose life situation brings them into frequent contact with government, may also be most vulnerable to unfairness.

## **The 2010 Issues**

What you see illustrated are the most prevalent issues that my Office dealt with this year.

Poor communication is the biggest one. This often translates into unreasonable delay, poor service followed by faulty decisions and a number of related problems.

These issues can only be addressed through systemic inquiries. It is those investigations that result in the fix for thousands of residents, rather than dealing with the same issue again and again at the individual level.

Not only does the systemic investigation eliminate future complaints and improve the quality of service for all residents, including those less likely to complain, but it has the potential to save large amounts of money and resources.

Let me give you an example of cost savings.

In my **water investigation** tabled in June 2010, the evidence found City staff at about \$38 an hour pumping a resident's holding tank on a weekly basis for a period of about 32 months. At what operational burden? At what cost? To what end from a good customer service perspective?

An investment in my office is a direct investment not only in improving customer service but a clear message that Council is committed to saving money and improving services across local government.

## **2011 Capital Budget Ask**

### *Background:*

The Accountability Officers were asked to prepare their own capital budget this year, a first as the City Clerk's Office rolled them into their budget in the past.

### *Ask:*

With regard to the Capital Budget, I am requesting approval of the 2011-2020 Budget, which includes \$0.500 million to implement a state of good repair maintenance for the Office's case management system.

Money is there to allow for a significant version upgrade to the application - applications typically have an effective lifespan of 6-8 years. After this time, the underlying technology that is used for the application will have changed significantly.

It is also good business practice to review business processes to ensure that the application is up to date with any changing business needs.

## **2011 Operating Budget Ask**

### *Background*

In the 2010 operating budget, I requested two Intake positions, only one of which was funded. Following Budget Committee's direction, we reduced our budget by 5% (\$60.9 thousand).

### *Ask*

The 2011 request is \$1,493.9, an increase of \$102.7 thousand for 2 positions with an annualization of \$73.4 thousand in 2012. This represents the salary and benefits for two new direct service delivery positions – one Investigator and one front line job.

This budget request is to address:

- The many under-serviced areas beyond the downtown core.
- Systemic investigations to deliver fixes that will impact a greater numbers of residents and consequently find efficiencies and savings.

- Maintain our customer service standards in responding to individual complaints

The request is a cost-effective way to preserve our ability to provide good service to individual residents, while increasing our capacity for systemic investigations that will yield permanent fixes to problems in the delivery of City services and programs.

*The pay-off:* Savings and improved public service.

Should Council decide not to grant this budget request, then I would implore you to minimally return the 5% reduction of \$60.9.

*I want to put this in context:*

Should Council reject my budget ask and keep the 5% reduction, I would put the public on notice that this represents a major service cut given the newness of my office.

The refusal to allow me to service all areas of the city is equivalent to telling me not to provide services to areas in Scarborough, Etobicoke, York or North York and other currently under-served neighbourhoods. And finally it will reduce our service capacity significantly as our current level is unsustainable.

Everyone has been talking about the fact that there are going to be no major service cuts this year. And I want to say while this may work for mature departments, it does not work for an office like mine that is still growing in order to meet the real demand that is out there for its services.

We cannot respond to the need for our service by re-allocating resources. That would mean ignoring current complaints from residents, to do outreach to underserved areas. If the office is not given the funding it needs, Council will be saying it is okay with having two classes of citizens in this city, those who find it easy to pick up a phone and call the Ombudsman, and those who don't.

And the second class citizens will include those who are struggling to make ends meet, often holding down two jobs, people working incredibly long hours just to pay the bills, people who are hard pressed and don't have the time to file a complaint, regardless of how badly they've been treated.

## **2009 Spending in Comparable Jurisdictions**

This Office is the low-ball outlier when compared to a sample of other Canadian jurisdictions. Toronto spends significantly less in relation to the population served when

comparing the City of Montreal or the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan or Nova Scotia.

In 2009, Montreal, the only other Canadian municipality with an ombudsman, had a population of 1.9 million and an office budget of 1 million compared to Toronto with a population of 2.6 million and a budget of 1.2 per capita, Montreal spent 54 cents versus Toronto at 46 cents a person.

The point in comparing jurisdictions is to demonstrate that if City Council is serious about improving services, it must provide the Office with the resources to do the job properly. This is particularly true when governments are actively seeking public service efficiencies. This is exactly when the chances of poor administration increase exponentially.

### **Consequences of No Increase**

The interest of taxpayers here is two-fold: They need fair, equitable access to solve their individual problems; and secondly, they need to see their City learn from its mistakes, improve service, and save money.

This is the valuable contribution that my Office makes and has been making since we opened in April 2009.

Access to my Office sends a very clear signal that the City is serious about fairness, access and good customer service. The impact of not receiving the requested funding for an organization that has just completed its first full fiscal year would include:

- Significant weakening of the ability to meet my legal mandate;
- Inability to provide equitable access for residents outside the downtown core;
- Severe limitation in doing systemic investigations, leading to unfairness, inefficiencies, greater costs to the taxpayer and dissatisfaction all round. These investigations are the most cost-efficient technique we have, because they solve hundreds of complaints at a time not just one.

No increase means fewer long term savings, decreased accountability and continued decline in public confidence. This will undermine the credibility of the Office, but I am worried it could also undermine people's faith in City Hall.

During the recent election, we all heard the demands for more respect for the ordinary citizen, and better customer service. And it's the Mayor's top priority. I am asking Council to make the promises of better service real.