

The Record

September/October 2010

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We try to demonstrate the value of listening and respectful behaviour, the importance of clearly understanding how an issue is perceived, and the impact of resolving complaints fairly, in a timely manner.

Read about what Fiona Crean, Toronto's Ombudsman has to say.



Your Ombudsman

It's about accountability

I just want to say



and relationships to fix smaller problems before they get bigger.

One of the issues frequently raised is why we keep the identity of persons contacting us absolutely confidential. By law, the Ombudsman can't be forced to reveal identities.

The assurance of confidentiality is important to the public's access to this office – there could be a chilling effect if a person thought his/her name would be on the morning news.

In reports to City Council, I review general details about an

My role, accountability and your privacy

The International Day of Democracy was declared by the United Nations General Assembly on September 15. Its theme was “Political accountability: strengthening links between parliaments and citizens.”

That theme is timely as we all demand greater accountability from governments.

In this environment, the role of the Ombudsman has increased in importance, and Toronto is no exception.

In our work with residents and City officials alike, we try to demonstrate the value of listening and respectful behaviour, the importance of clearly understanding how an issue is perceived, and the impact of resolving complaints fairly, in a timely manner.

Often we are able to convey to public servants why the public is distrustful and angry about something. In those situations, the organization has an opportunity to improve service

investigation, but always in a way that protects individual complainants, witnesses and staff.

We are fierce in guarding complainants' rights to confidentiality by maintaining a closed file system, closed computer files, and everyone working in this office must sign an undertaking of confidentiality.

Of course, if a complainant wishes to release his/her identity to the media, that is their privilege. But my lips remain closed. Forever!

Fiona Crean, Ombudsman

A word on independence



The City of Toronto has the most robust accountability framework in Canada. Embedded in law, Accountability Officers are independent from the executive arm of government and report directly to City Council.

This accountability framework is an important check and balance in our democratic governance system. An ombudsman is like an insurance plan for complainants – it is there to use when you need it.

An independent review of complaints is an obligation which all powerful institutions should offer if they wish to hold themselves out as part of a democratic society.

An effective ombudsman is evidence that a governing body expects its public service to be accountable for fairness in their

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about the work

independence, continued

actions and decisions.

The voters can express their opinions one way or the other on election day.

In the meantime, the Ombudsman can be an important element in keeping government accountable to those who feel their treatment has been unfair and/or unjust.

There is a vital element to a healthy democracy that an Accountability Officer may draw adverse conclusions without fear of retribution. The first responsibility to remedy the complaint lies with the public servants whose decisions are the subject of complaint. If a remedy is not forthcoming at

that level, the Ombudsman may continue up the ladder to have her recommendations implemented. If that doesn't happen, the Ombudsman still has recourse: City Council to ask them to implement the resolution, and to put the matter before the court of public opinion.

In the words of Australia's Victoria Health Ombudsman:

If the state ombudsman is watered down we all get piddled on, and this includes the ombudsman, the auditor-general, all other agencies of accountability, members of the public and, most importantly, our democracy.



Your complaint: our process

tell the City organization first and give them a chance to fix it. If you haven't been able to resolve the problem, you can contact us as the place of last resort.

The one exception to this is delay. If you just don't hear back then you should call. So, if you come to us before you have attempted to address the problem, you will be told to go back and make a complaint to the City organization first.

If you call us because you don't know who to complain to, we can give you the right information. And, if it is something we can't deal with, for example, police conduct or labour relations issues, we can advise you where to complain.

The majority of these kinds of complaints and enquiries are resolved within a few days.

In situations when we need to collect information such as notices,

correspondence, invoices and memos, it can take a little longer.

Sometimes the situation can be more complicated and we engage in "shuttle diplomacy" and different forms of dispute resolution that can take several weeks.

When we decide to do a formal investigation, that takes much longer. In those situations, we have decided the facts are in such dispute or sufficiently complex that we need to do an independent review.

Often cases raise systemic issues where we may have many records, documents, regulations and legislation to examine in addition to interviewing witnesses and related experts.

While investigations may take a long time, careful and thorough review is important because the decisions have human impacts and can bring important systemic improvements for many people and communities.

We look at the administration of government at the City. In other words, we take complaints from residents about unfairness in decisions, actions, or recommendations made or omitted by public service at the City.

If you happen to have a complaint, you have to

Out and about

In our community

On September 20, the Ombudsman gave a talk at the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman on "Intake: Common Practices and Challenges." It was attended by about 60 practitioners in the private, not-for-profit and public sectors.

On September 23, the Ombudsman attended a Women of Influence gathering.

On September 29, she attended the annual general meeting of the 519 Church Street Community Centre and on September 30, the Ombudsman joined in the Urban Alliance on Race Relations 35th anniversary celebration and 2010 awards dinner.

At the end of October, the Ombudsman will be meeting with the Integrity Commissioners from across Ontario. Early next month, she will be delivering a workshop to the Metro Toronto Chinese and South East Asian Legal Clinic entitled, "Holding the Toronto Public Service Accountable: Fairness, Access and Equity."

Welcome to the team



Kate Zavitz, Conflict Resolution Advisor, brings investigation and conflict resolution skills from her legal and academic training. Kate represented low-income, injured workers as a legal aid clinic lawyer and worked in private practice with a focus on labour and employment law. She has degrees in psychology and social justice and equity studies, and researched cross-cultural volunteering projects in Central America.



Andrew Sunstrum joins the team as a Conflict Resolution Advisor having spent ten years as an investigator at the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Prior to that, Andrew worked for the Canadian University Press as its Ontario bureau chief. He is a trained mediator and volunteers at Culturelink.

We welcome both Kate and Andrew to the Office of the Ombudsman.

talk to us

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The Office treats all communication in confidence.

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ombudstoronto.ca

about Toronto's Ombudsman

Fiona Crean is the City of Toronto's first Ombudsman and the Office opened in April 2009.

Her years as Ombudsperson for York University and Executive Director of the Ontario Ombudsman's Office have given her significant experience in conflict resolution, good governance and promoting accountability in the public sector.

Prior to taking on her post, Fiona worked for a number of years at the Ontario Human Rights Commission and was the Assistant Deputy Minister in the Ontario Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, responsible for addressing systemic racism and sexism.