



ALBERTA OMBUDSMAN
Focused on Fairness

October 13, 2009

Ombudsman promotes fairness for 200 years

Edmonton . . . Alberta has joined eight other provinces of Canada in declaring October 12 to 16 as Fairness Week in recognition of the 200th anniversary of the service of the Ombudsman.

Although the Alberta *Ombudsman Act* was proclaimed in 1967, the goal of ensuring fairness in government has been around much longer. The modern day Ombudsman institution was established in Sweden in 1809 when a Parliamentary Ombudsman was appointed to ensure that government agencies and departments acted in compliance with the law.

When the Alberta Ombudsman releases his annual report for 2008/2009 on October 13, 2009, a portion of the report will acknowledge and celebrate the 200 year history of the Ombudsman providing oversight and pursuing fairness of government around the world.

The Alberta Ombudsman is complaint driven, although he has the authority to initiate an investigation of his own choosing. Most investigations begin after a complaint letter is received from a citizen. The Ombudsman requires complainants attempt to resolve their complaint with the government agency first, but if all reasonable appeals are exhausted, the Ombudsman will initiate an investigation.

If the Ombudsman believes a complainant has been treated unfairly, he will attempt to resolve matters. His track record proves he is effective in finding resolution. Even if no remedy can be found for the complainant, the Ombudsman often recommends changes to government policy and practice so that similar problems will not arise in the future.

Alberta was one of the first jurisdictions to turn to an Ombudsman to achieve a higher level of fairness in government when the institution began to spread around the world in the 1960s. The first country outside of Scandinavia to appoint an Ombudsman was New Zealand in 1962. Alberta opened the first Ombudsman office in North American in September 1967, followed by New Brunswick, a month later.

There are now Ombudsman offices in approximately 140 countries around the world at the national and sub-national levels. Furthermore, the institution is proving adaptable to changes in governance structure. An example is the development of the European Union's supranational ombudsman institute, the European Ombudsman. The exact form of each office varies depending on the style of government to which it applies. The structure also varies, even in Canada. The Alberta Ombudsman is a general service Ombudsman looking at fairness in all Alberta government departments, agencies, boards, commissions,

designated professional organizations, as well as the patient concerns resolution process of Alberta Health Services. The federal government has appointed ombudsmen who deal with specific programs such as: the Taxpayers' Ombudsman, the Official Languages Commissioner, or the Canada Post Ombudsman. Many major institutions such as universities and banks have also appointed Ombudsmen.

For information on the Alberta Ombudsman visit our website www.ombudsman.ab.ca or call 780-427-2756 or 403-297-6185. If calling from outside Edmonton or Calgary, first dial 310-000 and then, when prompted, enter one of the 10 digit numbers.

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