



Public Policy Roundup

Fall 2015

The Ontario Ombudsman's Office & Education

Under the *Public Sector and MPP Accountability and Transparency Act, 2014*, the Ontario Ombudsman's office gained new mandates to investigate complaints about school boards as of September 1, 2015 and about universities as of January 1, 2016. The Ombudsman already has jurisdiction over Ontario's 24 community colleges, as well as the Ontario Student Assistance Program.

School Boards: The Ombudsman's office can now investigate complaints about the administrative conduct of school boards *that have not been resolved by local complaint mechanisms or appeals processes*. Complaints may include concerns about special education supports, school and school board policies, customer service provided by board staff, or other matters within the authority of individual school boards. The office will assess all complaints and refer them to local school board officials for quick resolution whenever possible, but if this is not successful the office may attempt resolution and if necessary investigate, make recommendations and follow up on recommendations.

Universities: The Ombudsman's office will be able to investigate complaints about the administrative conduct of universities *that have not been resolved by a university ombudsman or other complaint or appeal mechanism*. Complaints may include concerns about student services, program requirements, student accommodations, admissions, policies, or student financial aid. The office will assess all complaints and refer them to university officials for quick resolution whenever possible, and must consider the principles of academic freedom within universities when investigating any complaint.

To download brochures on Complaints about School Boards or Universities you can go to the website: <https://ombudsman.on.ca>.

AODA Update

On February 13, 2015 the Ontario Government released the final report of the [Second Legislative Review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act](#), by Ms. Mayo Moran. Partly in response to these recommendations (see Public Policy Roundup Summer 2015) the government released an Accessibility Action Plan called [The Path to 2025](#).

In addition to showcasing areas of improvement and examples that highlight exemplary practices, the Action Plan presented objectives such as:

- Consult and partner with businesses and people with disabilities to develop a voluntary third party certification program recognize businesses and organizations that have championed accessibility within their sector or community.
- Collaborate with service delivery partners both within and outside of government on pilot projects to enhance our compliance and outreach activities.
- Build on the success of the 2014 marketing campaign to create public awareness campaigns focusing on raising awareness of the AODA and the Employment Standard.
- Release an annual compliance and enforcement plan — which will include audit blitzes — and report back to inform the public on our efforts, and monitor compliance trends among obligated organizations.
- Explore opportunities through social media or online platforms to expand and strengthen the conversation on accessibility between businesses and people with disabilities.

On October 5, 2015 the Accessibility Directorate announced targeted audits of large retail organizations with 500 or more employees to determine compliance with the AODA.

On November 15, 2015 the Directorate announced the formation of a voluntary, third-party *accessibility certification program* to recognize businesses and organizations that have championed accessibility. Feedback is being sought from the general public, including persons with disabilities and businesses, at <https://www.certifiedforaccess.ca/>, on “the challenges faced by people and business as they work to make their interactions more accessible.”

Meanwhile the Directorate quietly released on a relatively obscure web location, proposed amendments to the *Accessibility Standards for Customer Service* and the *Integrated Accessibility Standards*. The primary changes are the alignment and integration of the Customer Service Standard into the Integrated Accessibility Standard, but there are other small changes that could be significant. The proposed changes can be accessed at: www.ontariocanada.com/registry/view.do?postingId=20303&language=en (read the Detailed Summary under Further Information) and feedback sent by December 31, 2015.