



22nd June 2018

To: All Media

Ombudsman for Bermuda Annual Report for 2017 Tabled

Hamilton, Bermuda: Victoria Pearman, Ombudsman for Bermuda has submitted her Annual Report for 2017 to the Speaker of the House of Assembly in accordance with her statutory duty under the Ombudsman Act 2004. The Report was tabled in the House of Assembly this morning and is available to the public.

The Report is structured around the Ombudsman's strategic aims which include:

- greater public access;
- greater public awareness; and
- championing best practice.

In 2017 the Office of the Ombudsman handled 283 cases. The Report provides a breakdown of the disposition of cases by ministry and authority and includes selected case summaries. It also provides useful information for the public such as making your opinions count on matters of national interest. It contains general information on seniors and financial assistance, Bermuda status and United States visa exemption, and organisational changes in Government.

During 2017 the Office inquired into various matters such as the Department of Financial Assistance's policies and procedures, communication of bus cancellation information by the Department of Public Transportation and the Department of Education's coordination of school learning support services. The Office also continued to prioritise senior abuse complaints oversight and follow-up on complaint handling oversight of financial institutions.

For three successive years the fact that the Land Title Registry remains closed to the public had been highlighted by the Ombudsman as a matter of grave concern, after taxpayers have paid millions of dollars to fund that office. In this Annual Report 2017 the Ombudsman notes she expects to see the Land Title Registry finally open to the public this summer following the announcement by the Minister responsible that the office will open on 2nd July, 2018. Commentary on the Land Title Registry is included on page 10 of the Report.

The Ombudsman comments, "The much-heralded initiative with the Ministry of National Security and the Department of Corrections which we highlighted in our Annual Report 2016 has not progressed as expected. We continue to push for strengthening the role of the Treatment of Offender's Board in complaint handling for persons incarcerated as was agreed by all sides. We learned belatedly the Ministry is re-considering its position. This does not explain why little was done to progress the initiative as an agreement was reached to do so in 2016... This highlights

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the need to follow-up and assess progress and the importance of keeping authorities accountable when they have agreed to take action.”

The Ombudsman also notes in her Message, “...in addition to receiving complaints and providing alternative dispute resolution, the Ombudsman listens and assists people to navigate administrative systems which can feel overwhelming and uncaring. Where we identify deficiencies or unfair decisions, we address this by making recommendations to put it right as well as suggesting improvements in an authority’s decision making process.”

“At the Office of the Ombudsman, our focus is people. We assist members of the public who can get lost in the extensive structure and complex systems that is the Government. People can be disadvantaged in obtaining services which may be cut back in difficult economic times or where services are backlogged and lengthy delays result. They should be told what to expect when this happens and not left wondering.”

“Good administration requires focus on customer service and efficiency. The Ombudsman’s role includes reminding public officials to be customer-focused, holding them to account so that the principles of ‘seeking continuous improvement’ and ‘being open and accountable’ are more than mere platitudes. They must be a part of the culture and what is expected.”

The Ombudsman expressed her “deepest thanks to all those who came to us seeking assistance. Bringing complaints to us is a valuable public service that alerts us to challenges which otherwise might not come to our attention. We do not take your trust for granted.”

For the first time a survey for feedback on the Annual Report 2017 is included. The public are encouraged to share their comments with the Office by returning the survey in print or electronically as indicated on the survey. Personal details will not be recorded. Once feedback is logged, all personal details if any including email addresses, will be discarded. The Report can be downloaded from www.ombudsman.bm, along with all previous reports published by the Office. Limited copies of the Report will be available for the public at the Office of the Ombudsman located at: Dundonald Place, Suite 102, 14 Dundonald Street West, Hamilton HM 09. For further information, you can call us at 296-6541 or email us at info@ombudsman.bm.

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Editor’s Notes:

- The Ombudsman is an independent, non-government official who investigates complaints from the public about maladministration in the delivery of public services.
- The Ombudsman Act 2004 is the governing legislation.
- Section 24 of the Ombudsman Act 2004 requires that, within six months of the end of the year, the Ombudsman shall submit an Annual Report to the Speaker of the House of Assembly, with a copy to the Governor and the President of the Senate.
- Sections 15-17 of the Ombudsman Act 2004 lay out the process by which the Ombudsman may make recommendations further to an investigation to which the authority is required to

respond. Pursuant to section 24 and 17, the Ombudsman may submit a special report to Parliament outlining an authority's: (1) failure to notify the Ombudsman of action proposed to be taken; (2) failure to take any action; (3) action that in the Ombudsman's opinion has been inadequate or inappropriate.

- For more information, contact the Office of the Ombudsman for Bermuda at 296-6541.