

**For Immediate Release****City of Toronto's Ombudsman releases 2010 Annual Report**

**Toronto – February 2, 2011** – In her 2010 Annual Report released today, the City of Toronto Ombudsman emphasized the importance of systemic investigations undertaken by her office.

“A lot of attention has been recently focused on the Ombudsman’s efforts to improve customer service,” says Ombudsman, Fiona Crean, “but this has tended to obscure the system-wide changes and savings that have been accomplished with my office’s systemic investigations.”

“At the beginning of last year,” says Crean, “I identified systemic investigations as a key to improving administration while addressing individual complaints. While systemic investigations are more resource intensive, they also provide a bigger payoff in terms of savings, improvements to service, and reductions in the number of complaints.”

The Ombudsman's 2010 strategic plan set a target of achieving one full systemic investigation; instead she completed five. They include:

- The complaint of a woman who suffered through 17 sewer back-ups over eight years. Instead of fixing the cause, the City installed a temporary holding tank, which had to be pumped out several times a week by Toronto Water staff at considerable expense. The Ombudsman found there had been unreasonable delays, bureaucratic malaise and institutional silos. The City agreed to develop new procedures and lines of authority and accountability for these “non-standard projects.”
- The case of a Municipal Licensing and Standards inspector who ignored a property owner’s dementia when issuing an order to cut down a tree on her property. The systemic investigation found there were no policies to guarantee equitable service to residents with diminished capacity. The City agreed to develop these policies city-wide.
- The case of a resident who was banned indefinitely from all city-run parks and community centres. The Ombudsman found that Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff kept no proper documentation of the allegations that led to the ban, nor had they given the resident an opportunity to respond to the allegations. Crean recommended the establishment of a notification and appeal process, and that bans last only for a set period of time. The City has implemented all of her recommendations.

“In each of these cases,” says Crean, “my investigator looked beyond the circumstances of the individual complaint, and found serious shortcomings in the City’s policies and processes, shortcomings the administration has agreed to fix. This will not only provide better public service but will mean less time and money taken up dealing with residents’ complaints.”

On the issue of better customer service, the Ombudsman is pleased the City is committed to developing a new customer service strategy in 2011. "Managers will clearly have the support of the thousands of everyday heroes in the city administration, who go out of their way to provide stellar service to residents," says Crean.

But Crean is disappointed that senior management failed to follow Council's direction and have all its complaint handling procedures in place before the end of 2010. "I am also concerned," says Crean, "that the City has not yet published the existing customer service standards, as required by Council a year ago." Among other things, these standards require that City staff return phone calls within 24 hours.

### **The Ombudsman by the Numbers in 2010**

The Office handled 1,562 complaints; 9 full investigations completed and 1,534 complaints closed after early resolution. As of December 31, 2010, 26 early resolution cases were still in progress, and 2 investigations were underway

#### Top 5 causes of complaints

- Poor Communications
- Faulty Decisions
- Unreasonable Delays
- Poor Service
- Unprofessional Conduct

#### Top 5 sources of complaints

- Employment and Social Services
- Municipal Licensing and Standards
- Parks, Forestry and Recreation
- Revenue Services
- Toronto Community Housing Corporation

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*Toronto's Ombudsman is an impartial and independent officer of City Council, providing an appeal of last resort for people who feel they have been adversely affected by a decision, act or omission of city administration. The Ombudsman also undertakes investigations into systemic problems that cause equitable, substantial and procedural unfairness in city administration.*