



## OMBUDSMAN FOR BERMUDA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

3<sup>rd</sup> July 2020  
Hamilton, Bermuda

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### **Ombudsman for Bermuda's Annual Report 2019 Tabled**

Victoria Pearman, Ombudsman for Bermuda, has submitted her Annual Report for 2019 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 Annual Report 2019 presents the Ombudsman's yearly update to the public on the work of her Office. In 2019 the Ombudsman's Office handled 299 cases, including 214 new complaints, 49 new enquiries and 36 outstanding complaints that remained open as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019.

The Annual Report 2019 includes selected case summaries which give insight into the different ways in which we worked to help people resolve complaints brought to us. It provides commentaries on Corrections' complaint numbers, mental health awareness and considerations for apology legislation, as well as useful information about public authorities which may be of assistance to the public during the Covid-19 pandemic. It also includes highlights from the 10<sup>th</sup> Biennial Caribbean Ombudsman Association Conference which was hosted by the Office last year. The Bermuda Declaration, a statement of principles for guidance to ombudsman in the region, was adopted at the Conference.

The Annual Report 2019 highlights some of the Office's work during 2019 including ongoing systemic investigations:

- into delays in hearing applications by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, which reportedly has been affecting the timeliness of victims of crimes receiving compensation;
- into the adequacy of the Government's communication about public bus cancellations and delays;
- into senior abuse complaints.



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The Ombudsman noted in her Message, “As Ombudsman, my duty is to protect the interests of the public to ensure fair treatment in the provision of public services. In doing so, we prioritise safeguarding the needs of the most vulnerable. Some of the people we have assisted this reporting year include the elderly and young in care; persons with physical and mental health challenges; children with special educational needs; the indigent; the unsheltered and people who have lost their liberty. These are areas where systems have not always provided what was needed.

“Ours is an office of last resort. We are here to assist when people are unsure where they can turn. During the period of compiling this report our island has been contending with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We along with people all over the world have had to adapt as best we can to this new reality we are currently living in. This pandemic has been a shock to the system. It has highlighted existing weaknesses and revealed additional vulnerabilities.

“Access to information corresponds with access to services. Those addressing the public must be mindful of this. It is unhelpful if people are directed only to online platforms to complete applications or ask questions when they are unable to do so. As the Government looks to advance e-Government usage, this will require consideration of ways to assist members of the public, including the vulnerable, who are not connected to the internet.”

Ms. Pearman further commented, “Our role is to safeguard access to administrative justice. We provide people who have unresolved complaints with an alternative means of fairly resolving them. We carefully listen to concerns and are alert to identify things that are not working. We use the information gathered, through our privileged position with the public, to learn. Our professional relationship with the public service and the Government allows us to bring issues forward to be addressed.”

The Ombudsman concluded by extending her “sincere thanks to members of the public who continue to entrust us with their complaints. Complaints brought to our attention help to identify areas of general concern.” She also expressed her thanks to “those who work in the various areas of the public service for their work, assistance and cooperation.” The Report acknowledges the Acute Community Mental Health Services at the Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute, Department of Corrections and Department of Financial Assistance for their work.

Due to COVID-19 precautions, print copies of the Report with an enclosed survey will be distributed and available to the public at a later date. The Office encourages the public to share their comments about the Annual Report 2019 and the Office’s services. A survey is included



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in the electronic version of the Report and is available online. The Report can be downloaded from [www.ombudsman.bm](http://www.ombudsman.bm), along with all previous reports published by the Office.

The Office of the Ombudsman continues its service to the public by phone and email. Arrangements can be made for appointments by calling or emailing us. For persons who do not have access to contact us by telephone or email, there are limited walk-in services to arrange an appointment.

For more information, contact the Office at 296-6541 or [info@ombudsman.bm](mailto:info@ombudsman.bm).

**END**

**Enclosed:** Bermuda Ombudsman Annual Report 2019; photos (2) of cover and the Ombudsman

**Editor's Note:**

- The Office of the Ombudsman for Bermuda is an independent, non-government office that provides an impartial form of alternative dispute resolution which is less formal and more flexible and accessible than going through the Courts.
- The Office of the Ombudsman's staff assists to resolve complaints about the administrative actions of public authorities, including government departments, boards and bodies established or funded by the Legislature.
- 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.
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