
MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE
OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN
2018 ANNUAL REPORT



"Auditur et altera pars. (The other side shall be heard as well.)"
— Seneca

Municipality of Anchorage, Office of the Ombudsman

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Dedication

“The Anchorage Municipal Ombudsman’s Office dedicates our 2018 Annual Report to former Deputy Ombudsman, Elizabeth “Betsy” Eisses. Thank you for your service, Betsy.”



Darrel

Betsy

May

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May 7, 2019

To the Anchorage Municipal Assembly, the Anchorage School District Board of Education, the Mayor and Administration, and the people of Anchorage:

We are pleased to present the Anchorage Municipal Ombudsman's 2019 Annual Report. This report explains how the Ombudsman's Office fulfills its role as an independent, impartial office that provides information about Municipal government, while investigating concerns involving Municipal government and employees, including the Anchorage School District.

The Ombudsman's Office acts as an informational resource for the public and also recognizes outstanding performance by Municipal and School District employees and workgroups, through our Above and Beyond Award.

Behind the cases and statistics are real people; individuals who need help navigating and understanding Municipal government, as well as the dedicated Municipal and School District employees who serve the people of Anchorage, and visitors to our community. It is our pleasure to serve, inform and empower the public.

Sincerely,



Darrel W. Hess
Municipal Ombudsman



May Ramirez-Xiong
Deputy Ombudsman

"Right is right, even if everyone is against it, and wrong is wrong, even if everyone is for it."

– William Penn

PURPOSE

The Office of the Municipal Ombudsman is mandated by the Anchorage Home Rule Charter. The Charter's Bill of Rights guarantees the people of Anchorage "The right to the assistance of a municipal ombudsman in dealing with grievances and abuses." The Office of the Ombudsman is governed by Anchorage Municipal Code, Chapter 2.60 which established the Office as "...an independent, impartial municipal office, readily available to the public, responsible to the assembly, empowered to investigate the acts of administrative agencies and to recommend appropriate changes toward the goals of safeguarding the rights of persons and of promoting higher standards of competency, efficiency and equity in the provision of municipal services." (AMC 2.60.010)

The goal of the Ombudsman's Office is to serve the people of Anchorage, by providing information or referrals, or investigating complaints and concerns regarding Municipal and School District departments, agencies and employees. The Ombudsman's Office has limited jurisdiction over Anchorage charter schools. If issues and concerns are not jurisdictional to the Ombudsman's Office, we do our best to direct persons to the appropriate person or organization.

"It takes a great deal of courage to stand alone even if you believe in something very strongly."

— Reginald Rose, Twelve Angry Men

HOW TO FILE A COMPLAINT

When people have questions or concerns regarding Municipal government or the Anchorage School District, the Ombudsman's Office is here to assist you. You may contact our office in-person, or by phone, email or postal service. Our staff will assess whether or not your issue is jurisdictional to our office. If an issue is not jurisdictional to our office, we will do our best to provide a referral to another agency or entity that may be able to address the issue. In 2018, the Ombudsman's Office provided information and referrals to 1,818 individuals, and opened 183 cases.

The Ombudsman's Office is located on the ground floor of Anchorage City Hall, in Suite 160. You can find a Complaint form online on the Ombudsman webpage at www.muni.org/departments/assembly/ombudsman. Complaints can be filed online through the Municipality's CityView Portal, at www.muni.org/cityviewportal. One-time registration is required to use the portal. Although details of Ombudsman complaints are confidential, contact information entered on the portal is accessible by Municipal agents.

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STATISTICS

The Ombudsman’s Office uses an application called “CityView” to maintain information and process statistics. The number of Inquiries listed in **Table 1 and Graph 1** indicate the total number of public interactions with the Ombudsman’s Office in 2018, either by telephone, email, postal mail, fax, or in-person. Contacts were interactions with persons who may have only needed information, or who may have wanted to express their opinions or concerns regarding local government. These interactions normally require no further action by the Ombudsman’s Office. Referrals reflect inquiries that were referred to state or federal agencies, community agencies, or to Municipal or School District employees, or departments. Cases refer to inquiries that required some level of investigation by the Ombudsman’s Office.

Table 1 2018 Processing Statistics

2018 Processing Statistics	From Prior Year	New	Processed or Closed	Remaining Open
Cases	10	183	189	4
Contacts	0	614	614	0
Referrals	0	1204	1204	0
Total Inquiries	10	2001	2007	4

Graph 1 2018 Processing Statistics

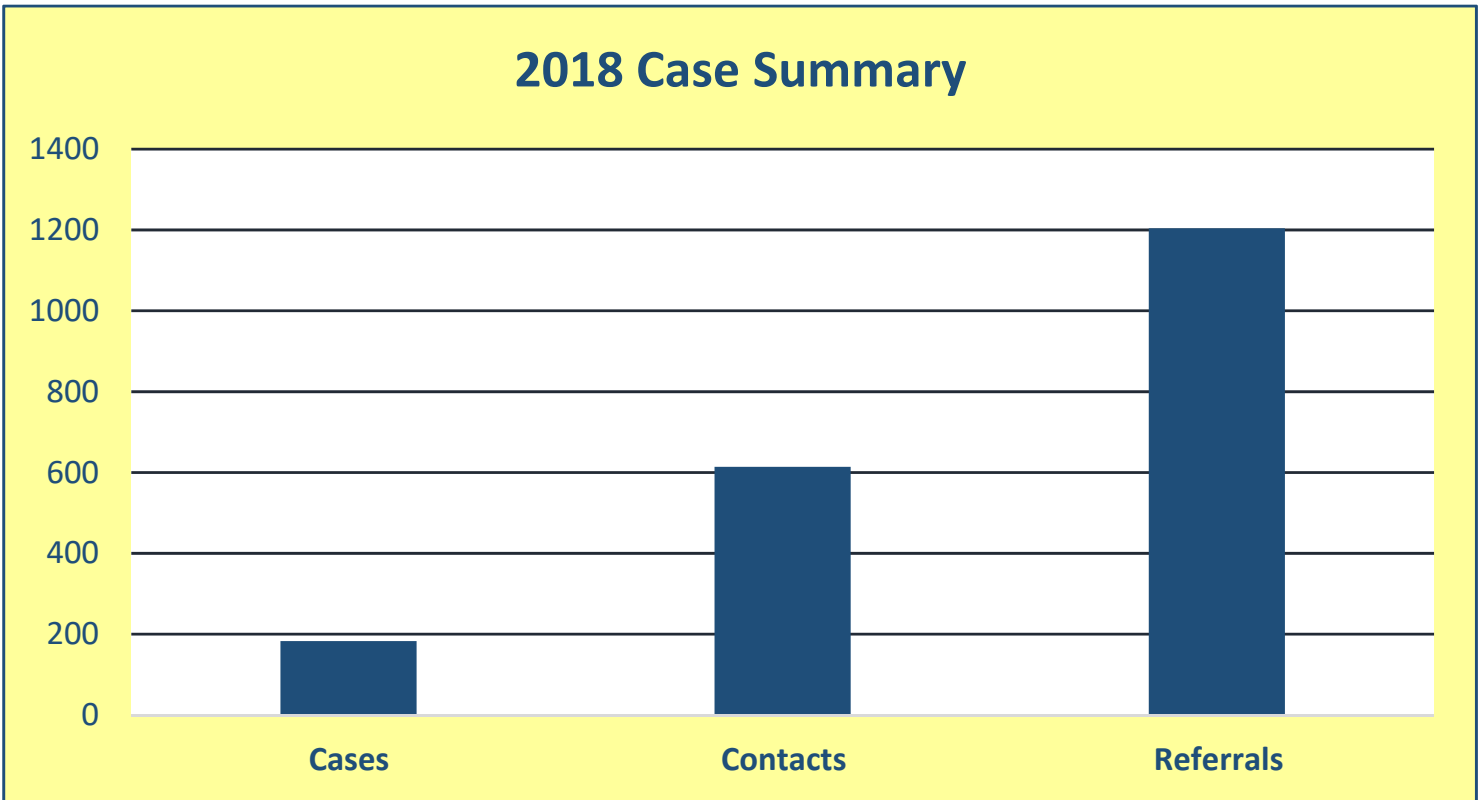
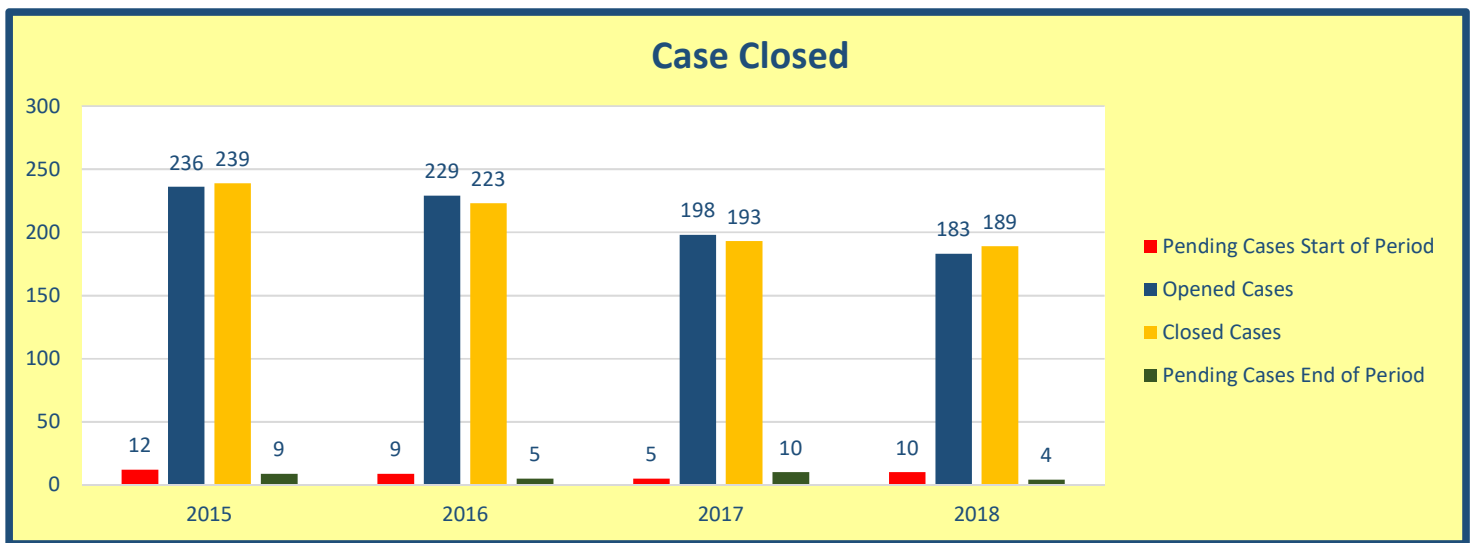


Table 2. Case Closures and Pending Inventory from 2015-18

Case Inventory	2015	2016	2017	2018
Pending Cases Start of Period	12	9	5	10
Opened Cases	236	229	198	183
Closed Cases	239	223	193	189
Pending Cases End of Period	9	5	10	4

Graph 2. Case Closures and Pending Inventory from 2015-2018



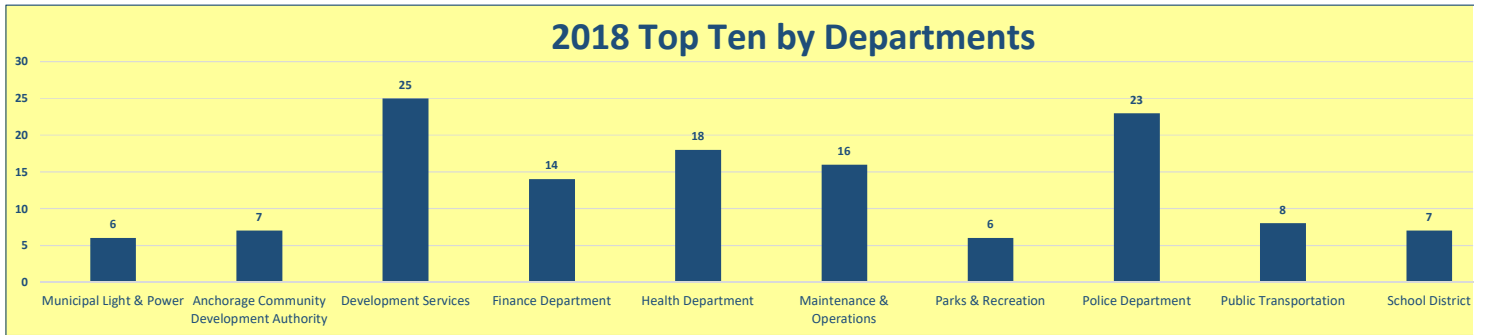
Historically, the larger Municipal Departments and those with the greatest public contact generate the largest number of cases in the Ombudsman’s Office. In 2018 the Development Services Department (13.66%), Police Department (12.57%) Health Department (9.84%), Maintenance & Operations Department (8.74%), and Finance Department (7.65%%), ranked 1-5. (See **Table 3 and Graph 3**).

Table 3. 2016-18 Cases by Department

Ombudsman Cases by Department

Department	2016	Percent	2017	Percent	2018	Percent
Anchorage Community Development Authority	8	3.49%	7	3.55%	7	3.83%
Assembly	2	0.87%	3	1.52%	3	1.64%
Community Development	3	1.31%	0	0%	0	0%
Development Services	35	15.28%	36	18.18%	25	13.66%
Economic & Community Development	1	0.44%	1	0.51%	1	0.55%
Emergency Management	0	0%	0	0%	1	0.55%
Employee Relations	5	2.18%	4	2.03%	3	1.64%
Equal Rights Commission	1	0.44%	0	0%	0	0%
Finance Department	18	7.86%	22	11.17%	14	7.65%
Fire Department	2	0.87%	1	0.51%	0	0%
Health Department	20	8.73%	6	3.05%	18	9.84%
Information Technology	2	0.87%	0	0%	2	1.09%
Legal Department	2	0.87%	6	3.05%	4	2.19%
Library	0	0%	1	0.51%	1	0.55%
Maintenance & Operations	7	3.06%	13	6.6%	16	8.74%
Mayor's Office	4	1.75%	2	1.02%	1	0.55%
Merrill Field	0	0%	1	0.51%	0	0%
Municipal Light & Power	4	1.75%	4	2.03%	6	3.28%
Municipal Manager	0	0%	0	0%	1	0.55%
Not Department Specific	6	2.62%	5	2.54%	3	1.64%
Office of Management & Budget	0	0%	1	0.51%	1	0.55%
Parks & Recreation	3	1.31%	4	2.03%	6	3.28%
Planning	2	0.87%	1	0.51%	2	1.09%
Police Department	50	21.83%	34	17.26%	23	12.57%
Port of Alaska	1	0.44%	0	0%	2	1.09%
Project Management & Engineering	2	0.87%	4	2.03%	0	0%
Public Transportation	17	7.42%	13	6.6%	8	4.37%
Public Works Administration	2	0.87%	0	0%	2	1.09%
Purchasing Department	0	0%	1	0.51%	1	0.55%
Real Estate Department	7	3.06%	3	1.52%	1	0.55%
Risk Management	4	1.75%	5	2.54%	5	2.73%
Safety Department	0	0%	0	0%	1	0.55%
School District	8	3.49%	8	4.06%	7	3.83%
Solid Waste Services	4	1.75%	4	2.03%	4	2.19%
Traffic	3	1.31%	3	1.52%	8	4.37%
Transportation Inspection	1	0.44%	2	1.02%	1	0.55%
Water & Wastewater Utility	5	2.18%	3	1.52%	5	2.73%
All Departments	229	100%	198	100%	183	100%

Graph 3. 2018 Cases by Department (most frequent)

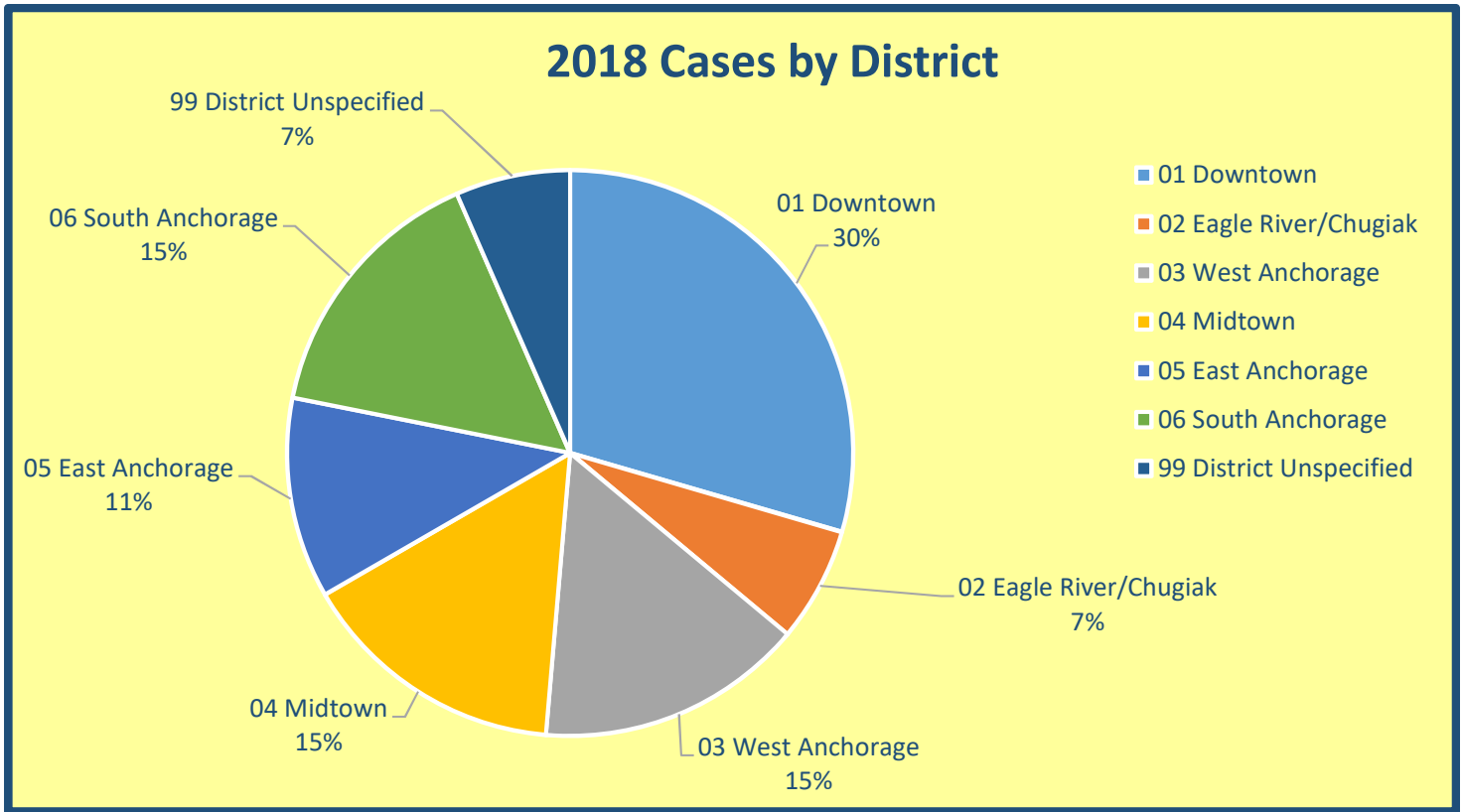


The Ombudsman’s Office also tracks Cases by Assembly District. These numbers are reflected in **Table 4** and **Graph 4**.

Table 4. Cases by Assembly District 2016-2018

District No./Name	Cases 2016	Percent	Cases 2017	Percent	Cases 2018	Percent
00 Not District Specific	1	0.44	0	0	0	0
01 Downtown	69	30.13	59	29.44	54	29.51
02 Eagle River/Chugiak	14	6.11	9	4.57	12	6.56
03 West Anchorage	20	8.73	29	14.72	28	15.3
04 Midtown	33	14.41	21	10.66	28	15.3
05 East Anchorage	32	13.97	31	15.74	21	11.48
06 South Anchorage	17	7.42	25	12.69	28	15.3
77 Out of Anchorage	8	3.49	6	3.05	1	0.55
99 District Unknown	35	15.28	18	9.14	11	6.01
Total	229	100	198	100	183	100

Graph 4. Cases by Assembly District 2018



2018 CASE RESOLUTION SUMMARIES

In 2018, the Ombudsman’s Office opened 183 cases, and closed 189 (with 10 carried over from 2017). We ended 2018 with 4 open cases. The majority of Ombudsman investigations are resolved informally, and final investigative reports are not required. Frequently the Ombudsman’s Office achieves good results, including changes to Municipal Code, policies and procedures through informal case resolutions, working with Municipal employees and departments, as well as complainants. Below are summaries of some of our 2018 cases:

2018-0018

An individual contacted the Ombudsman’s Office alleging that her 94-year old father’s truck had been stolen on 03/17/17. The truck was recovered by the Anchorage Police Department on 03/29/17. She stated that her father was not notified that the truck had been recovered until he received a letter from the tow company, dated 07/14/17. She stated that it cost her father \$1,176.50 to retrieve the truck on 07/17/17. This was \$700.00-\$800.00 more than it would have cost him had he retrieved the vehicle in March. When the complainant contacted APD, they informed her that they had left a voice message for her father on 03/29/17, informing him that his truck had been recovered. She stated that her father does not have a voice mail system, and that he was not notified by APD that his truck had been recovered. She questioned APD's procedures for notifying individuals when their stolen vehicles are recovered.

The Ombudsman reviewed the APD report for the recovery of the truck, and determined that APD's only attempt to contact the owner was a phone call that the responding officer had made. In his report the officer had noted that no one answered the phone and he left a voice message. APD did not make any additional attempts to contact the truck's owner. The phone number listed in the report was correct, but there was no way to know if the officer had misdialled. The complainant was adamant that her father's home phone does not have voice messaging capability. The Ombudsman consulted with the Municipal Attorney's Office and determined that simply leaving a voice message is not adequate notice to a vehicle owner that their stolen vehicle has been recovered. The responding officer might misdial when placing the call, or someone might inadvertently erase the message without the vehicle owner hearing it. The Ombudsman referred the truck's owner to the MOA, Risk Management Department to file a claim for the excess vehicle storage fees that he had paid. The Ombudsman advised Risk Management that he believed that the voice message was not sufficient notification, and that the MOA should reimburse the truck's owner for the excess fees he had paid. Risk Management eventually paid the claim. APD initiated a review of their procedures for notifying individuals when their stolen vehicles are recovered.

2018-0054

A constituent contacted the Ombudsman's Office questioning why the on-street parking across from her home was marked "No Parking 11 pm-6 am". She noted that the streets in her neighborhood are narrow, with limited on-street parking, and that disallowing overnight parking in the area across from her home limits the parking options for neighborhood residents and visitors. She wanted to know if the signs were installed to deal with a legitimate traffic safety concern, or at the request of a "connected" individual.

The Ombudsman determined that the signs were installed in the 1980's to address the concerns of individuals living in the neighborhood regarding long-term parking of motorhomes and campers. At that time, the Anchorage Police Department requested that the Traffic Department install signs to help with their enforcement of the parking codes. Later rewrites of Title 9 allowed the APD to enforce the parking codes without signs being posted. The Traffic Department removed the signs in question, and installed new signs that state "No Long Term Parking", and cite the relevant section of code, AMC 9.30.050. This allows for overnight parking, but not longer-term parking.

2018-0606

A constituent visited the Ombudsman's Office with documents concerning his Anchorage Water & Wastewater Utility bill. He alleged that his most recent AWWU bill had indicated that the delinquent amount must be paid by 03/15/2018 to avoid a service disconnect. He stated that he had paid his \$390.03 balance in full, and provided a copy of the bank transaction that showed payment was made on 03/02/2018. However, AWWU still disconnected his service and was charging him fees to have his service reinstated.

The Deputy Ombudsman determined that AWWU had made every effort to work with the complainant concerning his account. His water service was shutoff prior to his payment on March 2, 2018. Investigation revealed that the complainant had illegally turned his service back on himself. His current account balance included a \$209.00 fee for turning his service back on without authorization, plus regular monthly charges

for water and wastewater services received from 3/1/18 – 3/29/18, and standard regulatory cost charges. In the course of her inquiry the Deputy Ombudsman noticed that how AWWU listed delinquent due dates on monthly account bills could be confusing for consumers, and give them the false impression that they had a longer timeframe to bring their account current before they would be disconnected. The Ombudsman's Office met with AWWU staff to review the issue, and AWWU eventually revised their delinquent notices.

2018-0782

A senior contacted the Ombudsman's Office alleging that he had purchased a "youth" bus pass with the People Mover mobile app because the app only offers options to purchase "youth" or "adult" bus passes. He stated that a senior bus pass is supposed to be half-fare, and since the "senior" option was not available, he purchased the youth bus pass for the same amount. An adult one-day bus pass would have cost \$5.00. He attempted to board the bus with the youth pass, but the bus operator did not allow him to board the bus. The complainant stated that he was upset and decided to walk back home. The constituent stated that he does not understand requiring a "senior citizen to travel to the Downtown Transit Center to provide proof of age, in order to purchase a senior bus pass".

The Deputy Ombudsman found the individual's complaint to be partially justified. People Mover does not provide senior bus passes; People Mover provides a half-fare program that seniors and individuals with disabilities may apply for. People Mover is working on updates for their mobile app that will explain the half-fare program option. The updates will include a disclaimer informing seniors who have not applied and been approved for the half-fare program that they may purchase an adult bus pass. In order to qualify for the half-fare program, Individuals must apply at the People Mover, Customer Service window at the Downtown Transit Center, and provide verification of eligibility. People Mover refunded the \$2.00 that the individual had paid for the youth bus pass that he did not use.

2018-0910

During her review of Ombudsman Case OM2018-0889, related to a public information request, the Deputy Ombudsman discovered that Operating Policy/Procedure (P&P), P&P No. 52-8 - Public Access To Records and Publication had not been updated since 1991. The Deputy Ombudsman noted inconsistencies and contradictions in the document. While the section of the P&P addressing the "Records Center" specifically states, "Release original records only upon receipt of a written request", the section addressing "Procedures" does not indicate or specify that a public information request shall be in writing. Instead, it states, "The public will direct all requests for public records to the appropriate Municipal agency..."

The Deputy Ombudsman contacted the Information Technology Department, Customer Service Manager and recommended that the department review P&P No. 52-8. She recommended that the policy be revised to clarify that requests for public records must be submitted to the department(s) in writing. The IT Customer Service Manager responded that he would be meeting with the Municipal Attorney's Office concerning changes to the relevant sections of code, and that revisions to P&P no. 52-8 would be included in their discussion.

2018-0919

An individual contacted the Ombudsman's Office, upset that the Municipality of Anchorage, Property Appraisal Division had removed her senior property tax exemption for the last three years. The Municipality had billed the individual for underpayment of taxes, plus fees, for the previous three tax years. The complainant stated that she had discussed the issue with a Property Appraisal supervisor, who informed her that when she initially applied for the exemption the application that she signed clearly stated that she must notify Property Appraisal if she was out of state longer than 185 days in any calendar year. The individual noted that she did not remember what she signed seven years ago, and was not aware of the 185-day rule.

The Deputy Ombudsman reviewed the relevant Alaska State Statues, relevant sections of the Anchorage Municipal Code, and an Alaska Superior Court Decision on Appeal from 2013. Anchorage Municipal Code requires that "Upon initial application, the applicant must have been a resident of the State of Alaska for the entire year prior to the exemption year." AMC 12.15.015.D.1.b requires that "In each subsequent year the property must be owned and occupied as the primary residence and permanent place of abode for at least 185 days prior to January 1 of the exemption year." Alaska Statute 29.45.030 (f) states, "To be eligible for an exemption under (e) of this section for a year, a municipality may by ordinance require that an individual also meet requirements under one of the following paragraphs: (1) the individual shall be eligible for a permanent fund dividend under AS 43.23.005 for that same year or for the immediately preceding year; or (2) if the individual has not applied or does not apply for one or both of the permanent fund dividends, the individual would have been eligible for one of the permanent fund dividends identified in (1) of this subsection had the individual applied." The Alaska Legislature enacted legislation that allows local governments to match the annual residency requirements for the senior property tax exemption to the residency requirements for the permanent fund dividend, providing an easy avenue to audit eligibility for the tax exemption. A review of the complainant's application for the senior property tax exemption showed that the document clearly states that it is the applicant's responsibility to notify Property Appraisal of any changes in their residency status. In addressing a similar case in 2013 the Alaska Superior Court ruled that "ignorance of the law, including the tax code, is no defense."

2018-1584

An individual contacted the Ombudsman's Office upset that a neighboring property owner was burning garbage on an adjacent lot. She noted that the wind carried the smoke, smell and debris from the fires onto her property. The complainant alleged that the property had been a problematic nuisance for over twenty years, and that the Anchorage Police Department and Land Use Enforcement had responded to the property literally dozens of times over the years, with no long-term solution to the situation. One neighbor had even been threatened with a machete. The complainant alleged that she had previously contacted Land Use Enforcement, the Mayor's Office and the Police Department, without achieving a long-term resolution to the situation.

The Ombudsman determined that the Chugiak property had been a magnet for illegal activity for over twenty years, and that the MOA had responded to dozens of complaints regarding the property. The property was having a negative impact on the quality of life of the entire neighborhood. The Ombudsman coordinated

a multi-department response to the nuisance property. On 10/30/18 the Anchorage Police Department's Community Action Policing Team (APD CAP Team), Land Use Enforcement (LUE) and Department of Health & Human Services visited the problematic property, accompanied by the Ombudsman. LUE posted the property as a public nuisance, giving the property owner 15 days to clean-up the property, or the MOA would apply to the Administrative Hearing Officer for an enforcement order to clean-up the property and bill the owner for the cleanup costs. The owners did not clean-up the property, and eventually the MOA took title for nonpayment of property taxes. On 11/14/18 LUE and the APD CAP Team visited the property with an MOA contractor who provided an estimate to clean-up the property. The contractor began cleaning up the property in December, tearing down multiple structures and removing seven junk vehicles. The residents in the neighborhood noticed an immediate improvement in their quality of life, and for the first time in over twenty years, the neighborhood could enjoy some peace and quiet. The complainant drafted a letter to the Mayor commending the MOA employees who had worked so effectively to address the nuisance property.

2018-1684

Two Girdwood residents contacted the Ombudsman's Office alleging that a subcommittee of the Girdwood Board of Supervisors held meetings that did not conform to the requirements of the Alaska Open Meetings Act (AOMA). They believed that the actions of the subcommittee should be "voided". They also alleged ethical violations by the members of the subcommittee.

The Ombudsman reviewed the Alaska Open Meetings Act, AMC 1.25 – Public Meetings, and the structure of GBOS and its committees and subcommittees. The Ombudsman determined:

Regarding GBOS-

- GBOS is an elected public body.
- GBOS meetings are subject to the requirements of the AOMA.
- GBOS meetings are subject to the requirements of AMC 1.25 – Public Meetings.
- Emails and documents exchanged by members of GBOS regarding GBOS business are subject to public information requests.
- Members of GBOS are covered by AMC 1.15 – Code of Ethics.
- Members of GBOS are subject to the jurisdiction of the Municipal Board of Ethics.

Regarding GBOS committees and subcommittees-

- GBOS committees and subcommittees are public bodies.
- GBOS committee and subcommittee meetings are subject to the requirements of the AOMA.
- GBOS committee and subcommittee meeting are subject to the requirements of AMC 1.25 – Public Meetings.
- Emails and documents exchanged by members of GBOS committees and subcommittees regarding committee and/or subcommittee business are subject to public information requests.
- Members of GBOS committees and subcommittees are not covered by AMC 1.15 –Code of Ethics.
- Members of GBOS committees and subcommittees are not generally subject to the jurisdiction of the Board of Ethics. However, the Board of Ethics is the Municipal body that reviews alleged violations of AMC 1.25 – Public Meetings.

In reviewing the complaint, using the most recent (2009) version of the AOMA, the Ombudsman determined that the requirement for noticing under the AOMA is triggered by the presence of “more than three members or a majority of the members, whichever is less...” A majority of the seven member Forest Loop Subcommittee is four, which is the same number as “more than three members”, so the triggering number for the body is four. The Ombudsman reviewed multiple emails and email chains with four or more subcommittee members included, in which subcommittee business was discussed. These serial emails were violations of the AOMA. Given the volunteer nature of GBOS’s committees and subcommittees the Ombudsman believed that the AOMA violations were unintentional, and were the result of a lack of training for subcommittee members regarding the requirements of the AOMA and AMC 1.25.

The Ombudsman drafted a memo to the GBOS that offered recommendations, including training in the AOMA and AMC 1.25 for committee and subcommittee members, to help prevent future violations. Regarding the allegation of ethical violations, the members of the subcommittee are not covered by the MOA Ethics Code, and GBOS committees and subcommittees do not have policies in place regarding conflicts of interest. As for “voiding” any action of the subcommittee, even if the subcommittee had taken any “action”, the AOMA does not allow for the voiding of any action taken by a strictly advisory body, such as the subcommittee.

2018 PUBLIC OUTREACH

In 2018 the Ombudsman's Office worked to improve the office's interface with the public, including;

- Continuing to use our City View Public Portal, which allows individual to file complaints online. The portal is optimized for smart phones and tablets.
- Continuing to update and make effective use of the Ombudsman's page at www.muni.org/ombud.
- Using the Anchorage Ombudsman Facebook page to engage with the public.
- Distributing Anchorage Ombudsman t-shirts, wristbands, lapel pins and ink pens at public outreach events.
- Conducting public outreach:
 - Catholic Social Services Refugee Assistance & Immigration Services Partners Meetings
 - Stories Come To Life Festival
 - 2018 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Community Wide Celebration
 - 2018 Day of Remembrance: Alaska Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League
 - Women's March Anchorage 2.0
 - Bridge Builder's Meet the World in Anchorage 2018
 - Hmong American Veterans Memorial Day Celebration
 - 2018 Japanese Summer Festival
 - Government Hill Elementary School – Multicultural Fair
 - Ida'ina Friendship Gathering
 - African-American History Month Forums at the Fairview Rec Center
 - Leadership Anchorage 21
 - Senator Tom Begich/Representative Geran Tarr – Constituent Meeting
 - NAACP Anchorage Unit 1000
 - 4th Annual Diversity Community Health Awareness Day
 - YWCA Alaska's Stand Against Racism
 - Bridge Builders' 2018 Unity Gala
 - Identity, Inc. Board
 - Back to School Health & Safety Fair – Fairview Recreation Center
 - Ballot Box Bash - Fairview
 - Asia-Pacific Heritage Month Celebration
 - 2018 Equality March & 2018 PrideFestival
 - 2018 CSS/RAIS World Refugee Day Celebration
 - 2018 Choose Respect March and Rally
 - 2018 Black History Month Celebration
 - 2018 Project Homeless Connect
 - 2018 Anchorage City Wide Juneteenth Celebration
 - Alaska Native Heritage Day Celebration
 - 2018 Welcoming Anchorage – Welcoming Week Festivities

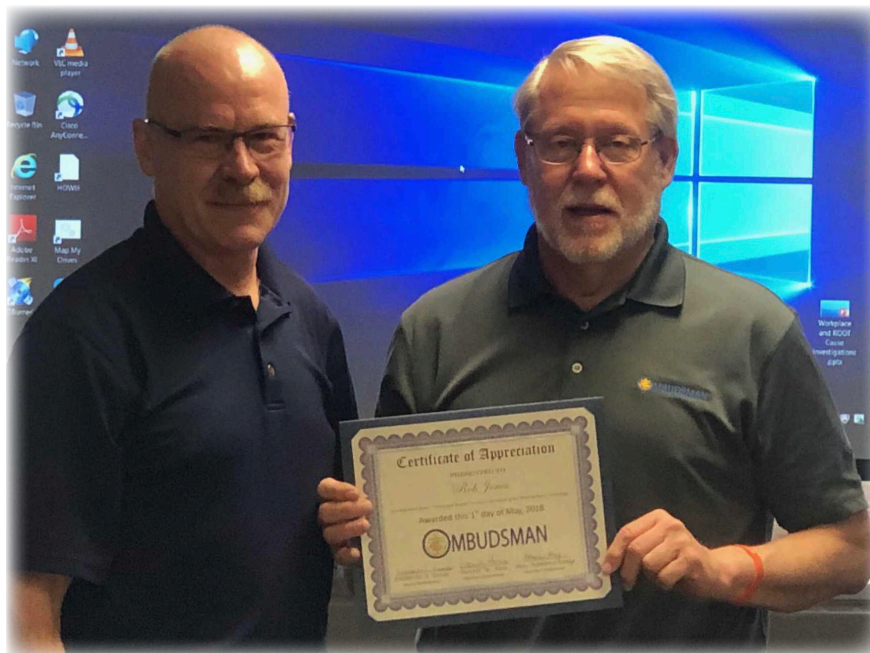
ABOVE AND BEYOND AWARD

The Ombudsman's Office recognizes outstanding performance by Municipal and School District employees and workgroups through our Above and Beyond Award, which acknowledges above and beyond service to the people of Anchorage. To nominate a Municipal or School District employee or workgroup to receive the Above and Beyond Award, call the Ombudsman's Office at 907-343-4461, or email to OMBUD@muni.org.

In 2018 the Municipal Ombudsman's Office recognized several individuals with the Ombudsman's Above and Beyond Award, in recognition of their commitment to delivering superior customer service to the people of Anchorage:



Will Brown, People Mover



Rob Jones, Anchorage Memorial Park Cemetery

ABOVE AND BEYOND AWARD



Officer Eric Jonsen, Anchorage Animal Care & Control



Deputy Chief Ken McCoy, Anchorage Police Department

THE OMBUDSMAN OFFICE

- › Acts as a resource for citizens, by answering questions and providing information regarding Municipal government.
- › Recommends to the Assembly, the School Board and the Mayor; changes in policies and procedures and Anchorage Municipal Code, to make the Municipality and School District more responsive to the needs of individuals and the community.
- › Responds in an independent, impartial and confidential manner, while safeguarding the rights of persons and promoting higher standards of competency, efficiency and equity.
- › Investigates complaints against agencies, departments and employees of the Municipality and the School District, as authorized by Anchorage Municipal Code, Chapter 2.60.
- › Makes findings and recommendations through formal investigations about the fairness of official actions by the Municipality or the School District.

BEFORE YOU CONTACT THE OMBUDSMAN

- › Be prepared. Gather any needed information and write down your questions before calling a government office.
- › Don't hesitate to exercise your right to call or write government offices for assistance.
- › Ask for the names of employees you speak with, take notes and save all correspondence.
- › If you are having problems getting answers, or are being treated discourteously, be sure to speak with a supervisor. If a supervisor cannot satisfactorily address your concerns, you can contact the Ombudsman.
- › Courtesy works both ways; be pleasant. Everyone appreciates being treated courteously. Recognizing that, for the average citizen, government is often difficult to navigate, the authors Anchorage's Home Rule Charter provided for a Municipal Ombudsman to act as an independent, impartial reviewer of citizen complaints.

FROM DARREL HESS

It is my honor to serve the people of Anchorage as your Municipal Ombudsman. The Anchorage Ombudsman's office is your independent voice for fairness in local government. Our office strives to assist citizens in navigating the agencies and departments of the Municipality of Anchorage and the Anchorage School District, responding to your concerns and questions.

Our goal is to assist, in some fashion, every person who contacts our office. Many of the issues brought to us are non-jurisdictional, but we will attempt to direct you to the correct person, agency, department, business or nonprofit, who can help you.

We look forward to informing, assisting and empowering you regarding local government policies, procedures and codes. Our services are free of charge, and available to anyone within the Municipality. It is our privilege to serve you.

WHAT IS AN OMBUDSMAN?

Ombudsman is a Swedish term, which means “protector or defender of people’s rights.” The Anchorage Ombudsman is appointed by the Assembly and is an independent, impartial reviewer of complaints and concerns. The Municipal Ombudsman is authorized by the 1975 Anchorage Home Rule Charter, and is governed by Anchorage Municipal Code, Chapter 2.60.

The Ombudsman is nominated by an Assembly selection committee, and if confirmed by the Assembly, serves a two year term. Reappointment is allowed. The Ombudsman investigates complaints of unfair treatment and unreasonable actions by the Municipality of Anchorage and the Anchorage School District, and their employees.

Complaints may result from the action, or lack of action, by a Municipal or School District employee. Often complaints are based on misunderstandings of Municipal or School District policies and procedures, Municipal Codes or individual rights. The Ombudsman can interview Municipal and School District Employees, examine confidential documents, inspect agency and department premises, and issue subpoenas.

The Ombudsman is a neutral fact finder when reviewing and researching complaints and the Ombudsman is not an advocate. If an Ombudsman investigation determines that an agency, department or employee made a mistake, or acted unfairly or arbitrarily, the Ombudsman may recommend corrective action. While the Municipality and School District do not have to follow the Ombudsman’s recommendations, they usually do.

THE OMBUDSMAN DOES NOT INVESTIGATE:

- The Assembly
- The Mayor
- The School Board
- State or Federal Agencies or Employees
- Disputes between private parties
- Tenant/Landlord disputes
- Decisions more than one year old (generally)
- Matters being adjudicated by the courts

MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT FORM

"The Ombudsman may investigate the administrative acts of agents of the municipality,...The ombudsman shall be barred from inquiry into acts of the mayor, the assembly or school board." **AMC 2.60.110.A. D**

What did the department do that you think is wrong? _____

What do you want from the department? _____

Please provide any other information we may need to help us investigate your complaint. _____

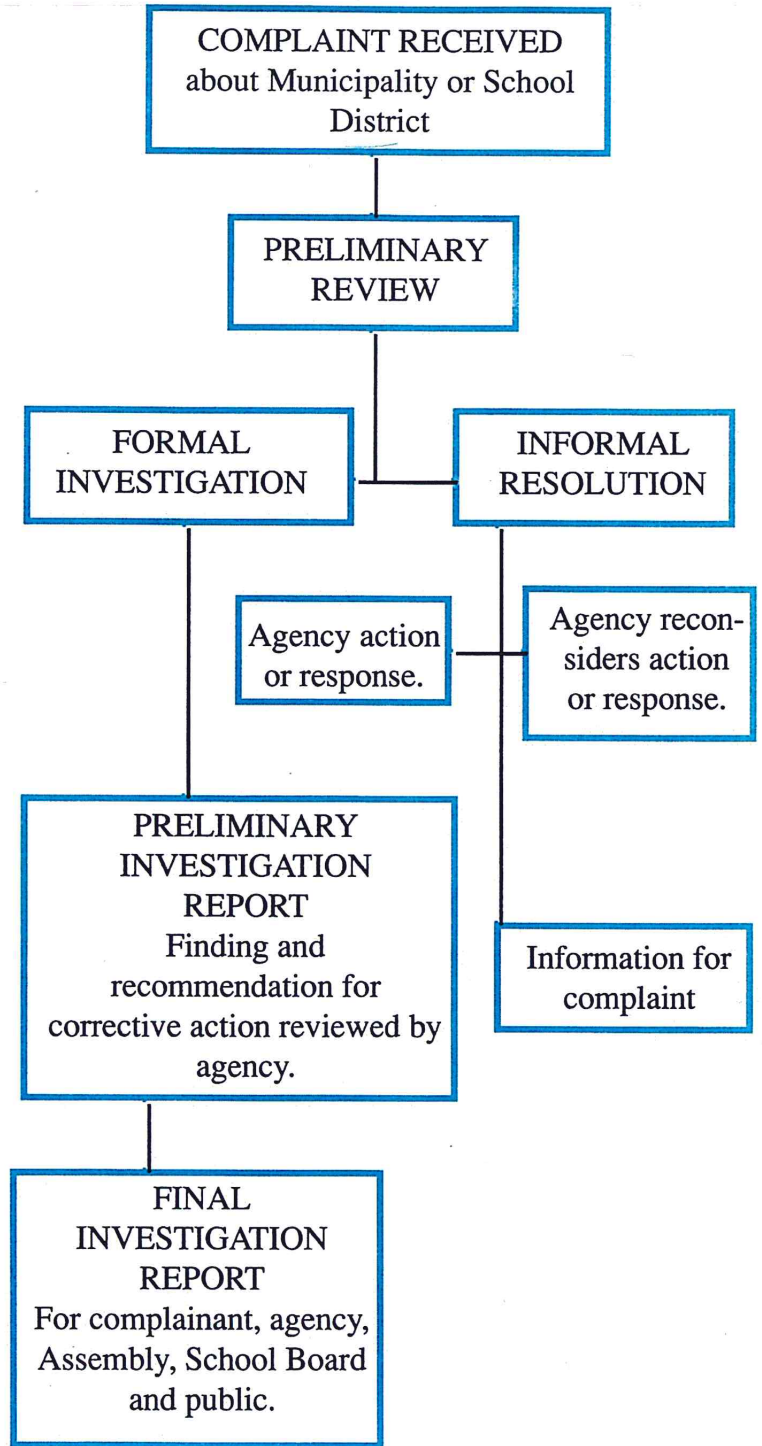
***IMPORTANT** We will not give out your name without your consent. Do you give permission to use your name when talking to the agency? YES NO Initial _____

Use this space to provide any further information you feel may be useful in our investigation. **Remember: The Municipal Ombudsman only investigates complaints about municipal agencies.** Use extra paper if necessary.

What do you want the Ombudsman to do for you? _____

Signature _____ Date _____

**COMPLAINT RESOLUTION
PROCESS**
Office of the Ombudsman, Municipality of Anchorage





WELCOMING
Anchorage
Stronger Together

In 2014, Anchorage joined the Welcoming Cities project, a collection of cities from across the United States that recognizes the economic, cultural and social contributions that immigrants and refugees make to our communities. Building on this network, Welcoming Anchorage is a collaboration between the Municipality of Anchorage, local businesses and organizations and the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation that strives to reinforce Anchorage as a place proud of our heritage and poised to position ourselves as a globally competitive, culturally vibrant 21st century community.

The Welcoming Anchorage initiative has five pillars: Employment and Entrepreneurship; Civic Engagement; Connected, Safe and Healthy Communities; Equitable Access; Education.

Employment and Entrepreneurship: Ensuring engagement in all sectors of Anchorage’s economy by tearing down barriers to entry and minimizing “brain waste.” Promoting entrepreneurship opportunities

Civic Engagement: Hosting annual Welcoming Week activities; hosting community wide diversity events, creating community partnerships, designing and hosting civic engagement academies

Connected, Safe and Healthy Communities: Promoting public safety, education about the law, and cultural awareness among service providers

Equitable Access: ensuring access for limited English proficient residents, eliminating barriers to community services

Education: building cradle to career opportunities for newcomers including childhood and adult education and ESL opportunities

#WelcomingAnchorage

On Facebook: www.facebook.com/WelcomingAnchorage

On muni.org: www.muni.org/departments/mayor/welcominganchorage

Contact Welcoming Anchorage: WelcomingAnchorage@muni.org



SPECIAL THANKS TO PIGGY, THE OMBUDSDOG

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This annual report was prepared by the following members of the Ombudsman's Staff:

Darrel W. Hess, Municipal Ombudsman
May Ramirez-Xiong, Deputy Ombudsman



May and Darrel



A special thank you to the Municipal Reprographics Team:
Ruth, Bob, Syd and Brandon, for their professionalism and invaluable assistance.

“The world isn’t fair, Calvin” “I know Dad, but why isn’t it ever unfair in my favor?”

— Bil Watterson. The Essential Calvin and Hobbes: A Calvin and Hobbes Treasury