
MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE
OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN
2020 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 2020 Annual Report to the hardworking, dedicated Municipal employees and officials who have kept our local government operating during the ongoing COVID-19 international health pandemic, and the dedicated, frontline workers who have kept our community functioning. Thank you for your service.”

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July 27, 2021

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 2020 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.

During the COVID - 19 global health pandemic, our office had to adapt our business model in 2020. The Ombudsman worked in the office, while the Deputy worked primarily from home. Leveraging modern technology, we were able to continue to respond to the public in a timely and efficient manner.

Behind our 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 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 2020, the Ombudsman's Office provided information and referrals to 1,193 individuals and opened 152 cases.

The Ombudsman's Office is located on the ground floor of Anchorage City Hall, in Suite 100. 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 2020, 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. 2020 Processing Statistics

2020 Processing Statistics	From Prior Year	New	Processed or Closed	Remaining Open
Cases	6	152	154	4
Contacts	0	332	332	0
Referrals	0	861	861	0
Total Inquiries	6	1345	1347	4

Graph 1. 2020 Processing Statistics

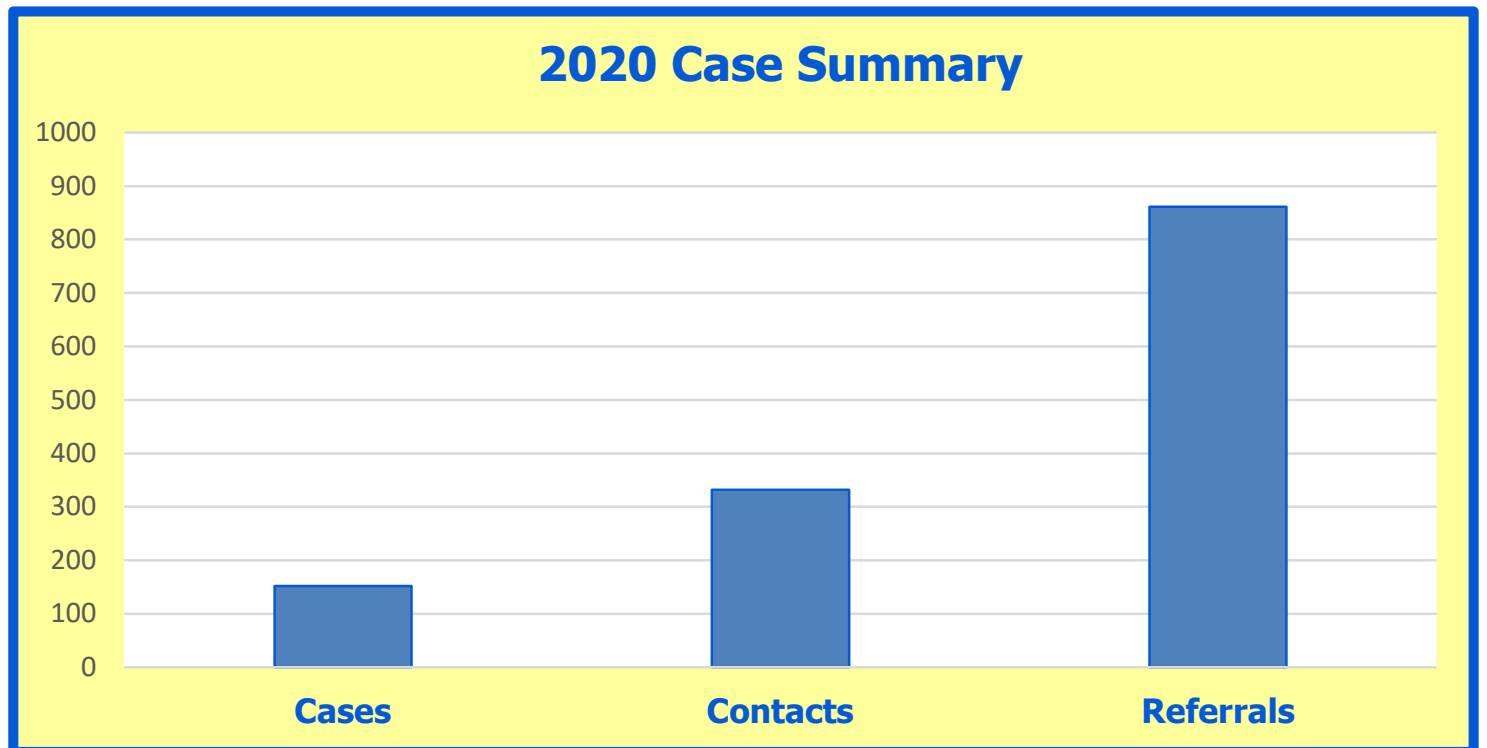


Table 2. Case Closures and Pending Inventory from 2017-2020

Case Inventory	2017	2018	2019	2020
Pending Cases Start of Period	5	10	4	6
Opened Cases	198	183	178	152
Closed Cases	193	189	176	154
Pending Cases End of Period	10	4	6	4

Graph 2. Case Closures and Pending Inventory from 2017-2020

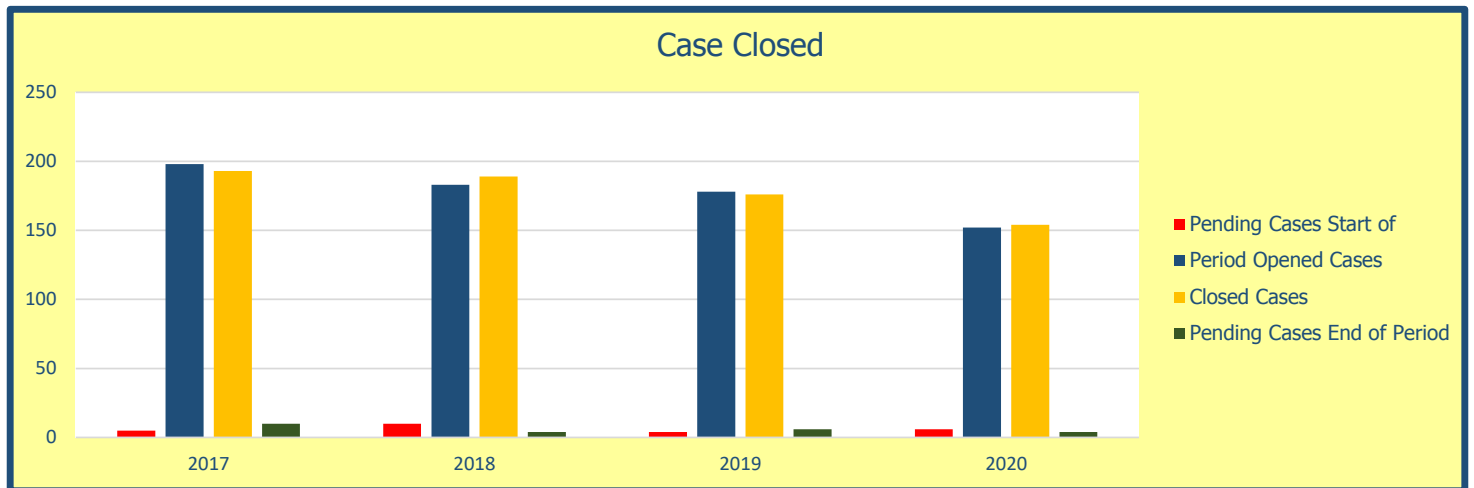
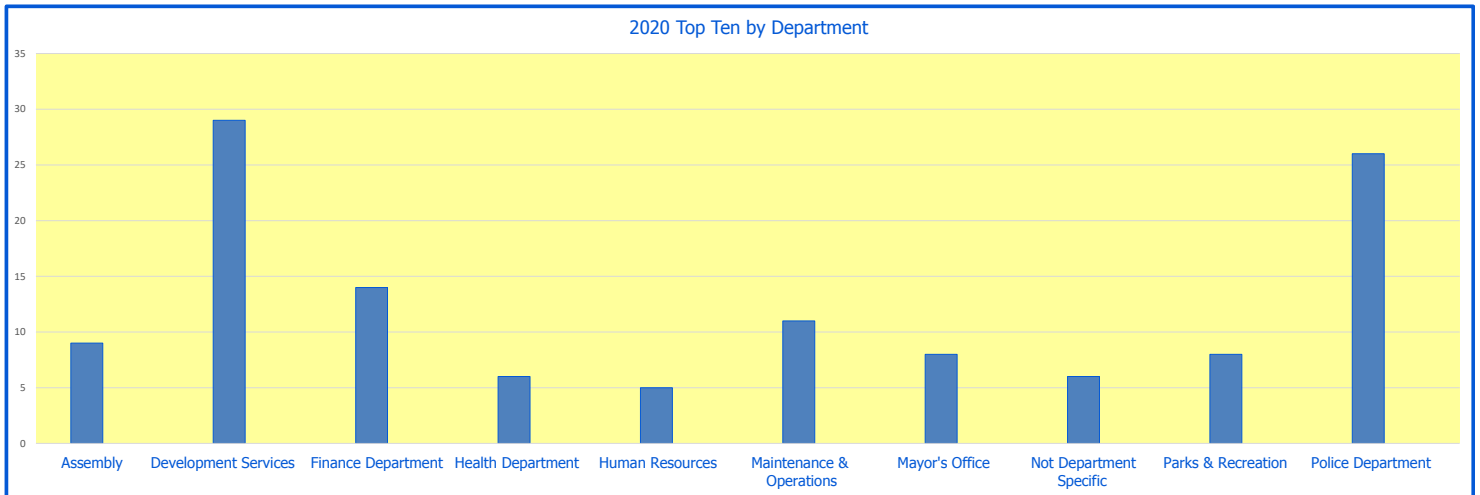


Table 3. 2018-2020 Cases by Department

Department	2018	Percent	2019	Percent	2020	Percent
Anchorage Community Development Authority	7	3.83%	3	1.69%	2	1.32%
Assembly	3	1.64%	4	2.25%	9	5.92%
Development Services	25	13.66%	26	14.61%	29	19.08%
Economic & Community Development	1	0.55%	0	0%	1	0.66%
Emergency Management	1	0.55%	0	0%	0	0%
Equal Rights Commission	0	0%	0	0%	1	0.66%
Finance Department	14	7.65%	16	8.99%	14	9.21%
Fire Department	0	0%	2	1.12%	3	1.97%
Health Department	18	9.84%	17	9.55%	6	3.95%
Human Resources	3	1.64%	6	3.37%	5	3.29%
Information Technology	2	1.09%	1	0.56%	1	0.66%
Legal Department	4	2.19%	1	0.56%	1	0.66%
Library	1	0.55%	0	0%	0	0%
Maintenance & Operations	16	8.74%	10	5.62%	11	7.24%
Mayor's Office	1	0.55%	2	1.12%	8	5.26%
Municipal Light & Power	6	3.28%	5	2.81%	1	0.66%
Municipal Manager	1	0.55%	0	0%	0	0%
Not Department Specific	3	1.64%	7	3.93%	6	3.95%
Office of Management & Budget	1	0.55%	1	0.56%	0	0%
Parks & Recreation	6	3.28%	14	7.87%	8	5.26%
Planning	2	1.09%	3	1.69%	1	0.66%
Police Department	23	12.57%	26	14.61%	26	17.11%
Port of Alaska	2	1.09%	0	0%	0	0%
Project Management & Engineering	0	0%	0	0%	2	1.32%
Public Transportation	8	4.37%	7	3.93%	1	0.66%
Public Works Administration	2	1.09%	0	0%	2	1.32%
Purchasing Department	1	0.55%	1	0.56%	0	0%
Real Estate Department	1	0.55%	0	0%	0	0%
Risk Management	5	2.73%	3	1.69%	2	1.32%
Safety Department	1	0.55%	0	0%	0	0%
School District	7	3.83%	8	4.49%	4	2.63%
Solid Waste Services	4	2.19%	2	1.12%	3	1.97%
Traffic Engineering	8	4.37%	3	1.69%	1	0.66%
Transportation Inspection	1	0.55%	3	1.69%	0	0%
Water & Wastewater Utility	5	2.73%	7	3.93%	4	2.63%
All Departments	183	100%	178	100%	152	100%

Historically, the larger Municipal Departments and those with the greatest public contact generate the largest number of cases in the Ombudsman’s Office. In 2020 the Development Services Department (19.08%), Police Department (17.11%), Finance Department (9.21%), Maintenance & Operations Department (7.24%), and Parks & Recreation Department (5.26%), ranked 1-5. The Assembly was at 5.96% but is not a department. (See **Table 3** above and **Graph 3** below).

Graph 3. 2020 Cases by Department (most frequent)

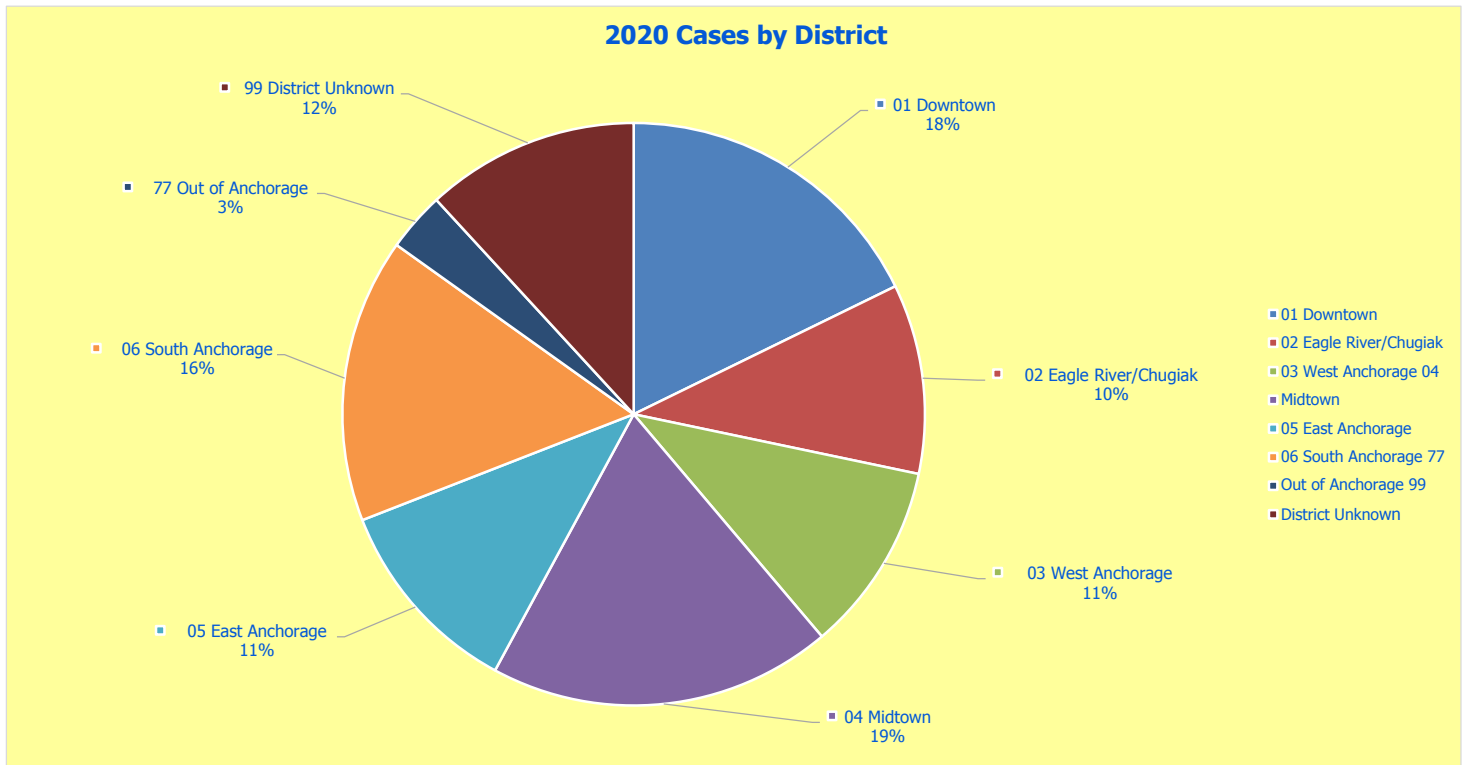


The Ombudsman’s Office also tracks Cases by Assembly District. These numbers are reflected in **Table 4** and **Graph 4**.

Table 4. Cases by Assembly District 2018-2020

District No./Name	Cases 2018	Percent	Cases 2019	Percent	Cases 2020	Percent
01 Downtown	54	29.51	45	25.28	27	17.76
02 Eagle River/Chugiak	12	6.56	14	7.87	16	10.53
03 West Anchorage	28	15.3	23	12.92	16	10.53
04 Midtown	28	15.3	29	16.29	29	19.08
05 East Anchorage	21	11.48	23	12.92	17	11.18
06 South Anchorage	28	15.3	23	12.92	24	15.79
77 Out of Anchorage	1	0.55	7	3.93	5	3.29
99 District Unknown	11	6.01	14	7.87	18	11.84
Total	183	100	178	100	152	100

Graph 4. Cases by Assembly District 2020



2020 CASE RESOLUTION SUMMARIES

In 2020, the Ombudsman's Office opened 152 cases, and processed or closed 154 (with 6 cases carried over from 2019). We ended 2020 with 4 open cases. Most 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 2020 cases:

2020-0092

A constituent contacted the Ombudsman's Office alleging that he had received a parking citation for parking at a Downtown parking meter, and that he never received the court hearing that he had requested through Easy Park. The constituent stated that he had contacted Easy Park multiple times regarding his request for a court hearing. He also stated that he requested to speak to a supervisor, and that it took over five weeks for him to be connected with a supervisor, who informed the constituent that it was too late for him to appeal the citation.

The Ombudsman's Office reviewed the timeline of the constituent's interactions with Easy Park, including his request for a court hearing, and determined that the constituent had timely filed a request for a court hearing. After meeting with the Ombudsman's Office, Easy Park reopened the constituent's case and scheduled him for a court hearing.

2020-0110

A constituent contacted the Ombudsman's Office alleging that the Municipality of Anchorage, Property Appraisal Division had removed his residential property tax exemption, even though he had filed for the exemption, and had lived in the home the required number of days per year to qualify for the exemption. The constituent also stated that his application for a senior property tax exemption had been denied, even though he met the qualifications for the exemption. The constituent believed that Property Appraisal's determinations regarding the exemptions were incorrect.

In reviewing property tax records and the tax history of the property where the constituent resided, the Ombudsman's Office determined that the constituent was not the legal owner of record for the property, and consequently did not qualify for a property tax exemption. Property Appraisal erroneously approved a residential property tax exemption in 2005. Because of their error in erroneously approving the residential property tax exemption, Property Appraisal did not seek reimbursement for the past exempted taxes. Property Appraisal will approve residential and senior property tax exemptions if the constituent files applications, proves that he lived in the property for at least 185 days last year, and proves that he is the owner of record. The constituent was advised to consult an attorney or a title company regarding having the deed to the property changed to show that he is an owner of the property.

2020-0158

A constituent wrote to his U.S. Senator, and copied the Mayor and the Anchorage Police Department, regarding issues involving his mother, brother, the Anchorage Police Department and the Girdwood Fire

Department. The Senator's staff forwarded the letter to the Ombudsman, requesting assistance for the constituent. The constituent was concerned that the Anchorage Police Department and the Girdwood Fire Department did not remove their mother from his brother's care after the constituent had called 9-1-1 multiple times, alleging that his brother was not adequately caring for their mother.

The Ombudsman's Office reviewed the files related to the incidents, and the relevant sections of State Statute. A government agency can only remove someone from their home if they take them into protective custody using State of Alaska, Title 47. In order for a person to be taken into protective custody under Title 47, the agency taking the person into custody must certify that the person is a danger to themselves or others, or that the person is profoundly disabled. Both the GFD and APD personnel who responded to the constituent's 9-1-1 calls determined that his mother did not meet the criteria to be taken into protective custody under Title 47. The GFD did notify the State of Alaska, Adult Protective Services of the constituent's concerns regarding his mother's care. The constituent was referred to the State of Alaska, Adult Protective Services, and was advised to consult an attorney regarding petitioning the court for a Title 47 protective hold for his mother.

2020-0289

Following the issuance of the Mayor's Emergency Order during the COVID – 19 health pandemic, a constituent questioned why doggie daycare facilities were not considered essential businesses under the Mayor's COVID - 19 emergency order, to provide services to critical and essential workers. The constituent is a medical provider and believed that it was not fair or reasonable for the Municipality to allow child daycare facilities to serve critical and essential workers, and to not allow doggie daycare facilities to serve critical and essential workers.

The Ombudsman's Office reviewed the relevant emergency order and researched how other communities and states were dealing with doggie daycare facilities during the COVID – 19 pandemic. The Ombudsman's Office discovered that multiple communities and states, including New York City and California, were allowing doggie daycare facilities and dog-walking businesses to provide services to critical and essential workers during the ongoing pandemic. The Ombudsman's Office contacted the Mayor's Chief of Staff regarding the issue; the Mayor's Office determined that doggie daycare facilities could operate to provide services to critical and essential workers.

2020-0404

A constituent contacted the Ombudsman's Office with multiple concerns regarding a neighboring residential property. The constituent alleged that there were multiple vehicles parked on the property, and that there were multiple vehicles parked on-street, some of which did not have current license plates, and were in various stages of disrepair and damage. The constituent feared retaliation and requested to remain anonymous.

The Ombudsman made a site visit and determined that the constituent's concerns appeared to be valid. The Ombudsman contacted Code Enforcement and the Anchorage Police Department, Traffic Unit, Acting Sergeant. Land Use Enforcement made a site visit and determined that the tenant may be operating an illegal home vehicle repair business. LUE requested an on-site meeting with the property owner. APD dispatched a

Community Service Officer to the property. The CSO tagged 4 vehicles that were parked on-street and noted that it may be a situation involving an illegal vehicle repair business. The constituent was apprised of the actions being taken by the departments; the constituent reported that the situation had improved.

2020-0473

A constituent questioned why she was required to pay a \$350 perpetual maintenance fee for her daughter's grave marker at Anchorage Memorial Park Cemetery, but did not have to pay the fee for markers that she had placed in another section of the cemetery. The constituent also stated that she was not given a choice of which section her daughter's remains were placed in.

The Ombudsman's Office met with the Anchorage Memorial Park Cemetery, Director, and reviewed relevant documents. The \$350 perpetual maintenance fee for upright markers in the new sections of the Cemetery (A & B) was recommended by the Cemetery Advisory Board and approved by the Assembly (AMC 2014-62, approved on 05/20/14). The perpetual maintenance fee (a lower amount) for the older sections of the cemetery is included in the costs of interment. The plot reservation for the constituent's daughter was handled through the funeral home, which should have advised her of the perpetual maintenance fee. In the fall the Cemetery prepares multiple plots for winter burials in the newer sections (A & B) of the Cemetery. If a person would rather have someone interred in one of the older sections of the Cemetery, they would have to wait until spring, and would have to pay a funeral home to store the remains until interment. The Ombudsman requested that the Cemetery Director send an email to all of the local funeral homes to remind them of the \$350 perpetual maintenance fee for upright markers in Sections A & B.

2020-0532

A constituent contacted the Ombudsman's Office alleging that the Municipality of Anchorage, Property Appraisal Division had removed his residential exemption because they learned that he advertised his home for rent online. The constituent stated that when he learned of the removal of the tax exemption, he called Property Appraisal and was informed that they had removed the tax exemption because he had not responded to the letters that they had sent to him. The constituent alleged that he never received any notice in the mail, and that even after he proved he resided at the residence for at least 185 days during the tax years in question, Property Appraisal refused to retroactively reinstate his exemption.

The Deputy Ombudsman reviewed the timeline of the case and the relevant documents and Municipal Code. Based on her review, the Deputy Ombudsman recommended to the Appraiser that he reconsider reinstating the constituent's residential property tax exemption for the 2018 and 2019 tax years; the constituent's tax exemptions were restored for those years.

2020-0557

A constituent contacted the Ombudsman's Office, alleging that in 1977 the developer who built her home buried a pipe in an easement to drain excessive water from the adjacent properties, and channel runoff from a nearby creek. The constituent alleged that the pipe has rusted and that now all of the homes are experiencing flooding problems. The constituent believed that the Municipality of Anchorage is responsible for fixing the pipe and alleviating the flooding issues. The constituent had spoken with

multiple Municipal offices and employees who had informed her that the Municipality was not liable for fixing the pipe or alleviating the flooding issues caused by excessive on-property water issues.

The Ombudsman's Office spoke with Municipal staff and reviewed relevant documents and Municipal Code. The Municipality did not approve or "accept" the drainpipe that was installed by the private developer. The Municipality was unaware of the pipe's existence until 2010, when a portion of the pipe was uncovered during work in the drainage easement. Project Management & Engineering, Eagle River Street Maintenance, and Watershed Management all believe that the issue of excess water on the constituent's property is caused by ground water on the property, and that replacing the pipe would not improve the situation. The Municipal Manager and Legal Department also reviewed the issue. Municipal staff believes that if the constituent has a French drain and/or dry well installed on her property to get the water to the drainage easement, the drainage problem would be resolved.

2020-0703

A constituent contacted the Ombudsman's Office regarding a property that he had purchased at auction. The constituent stated that he had not been able to access his property because there was someone living in the property. The constituent believed that the Municipality should have informed him that the property was occupied and believed that he should not have to pay 2020 Municipal property taxes for a property he had not been able to access. The constituent stated that he went to the Treasury Department to pay his taxes and requested to speak to the person with the highest authority; he stated that staff said it was the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman's Office reviewed documents related to the constituent's property, and the relevant sections of Municipal code. The Ombudsman's Office determined that the constituent had purchased the property at a deed of trust auction at the courthouse, not at a Municipal property tax-foreclosure sale. The Municipality had no way of knowing that the property was occupied, and had no obligation to inform the constituent that a tenant of the former owner was living in the property when he purchased it. The former tenant's occupancy of the property is a civil matter; the constituent most likely needs to go through the court eviction process. The constituent was advised to consult an attorney regarding this issue. Per Municipal Code and State Statute, the owner of record of a property as of January 1st is responsible for payment of property taxes for that tax year. However, payment of property taxes by the constituent might have been a condition of the auction. The constituent was advised to review the auction documents and was referred to the mortgage company to verify who is responsible for payment of property taxes for the 2020 tax year.

2020-0852

A constituent sent photos to the Ombudsman's Office, of a "transformer" that is on her property. The constituent requested to have the Municipal Light & Power transformer removed. The constituent believed that the transformer was a hazard and was concerned about her safety. The constituent requested that ML&P remove the transformer from her property and was informed it would cost \$40-\$50,000 to relocate the equipment, and that ML&P would not relocate the transformer.

The Deputy Ombudsman inquired into the constituent's concerns and determined that the transformer had been located on the constituent's property for over 20 years, serves 33 customers, and was in-place

when the constituent purchased the property in 2015. ML&P stated that it would cost \$40-\$60,000 in labor and engineering costs to relocate the transformer. ML&P believed that the transformer did not pose a threat and noted that the transformer is located within a platted utility easement. The Deputy Ombudsman confirmed with the Municipality's Current Planning Manager that there is a 10-foot utility easement from the property line, and that the transformer is located within the platted utility easement. The constituent was referred to the State Recorder's Office to obtain a copy of the plat for her property.

2020-0958

Several constituents called the Ombudsman's Office questioning the placement of "Anchorage for BLM" banners on the outside of the Alaska Center for the Performing Arts building. The constituents noted that the ACPA is a Municipal (public) building, and they questioned the criteria and policy used to determine what materials may be placed on the outside of the building. Related to Ombudsman cases OM20200935, 0938,0966 0975, 0976, 0979, 0980, 0985, 0986, 0987, 0988 & 0992.

The Ombudsman reviewed the ACPA's banner policy and discussed the matter with the Municipality's Legal Department. The ACPA banner policy implied that only banners related to events being held at the ACPA were to be placed on the outside of the building, but did not actually limit placement of banners to banners advertising events being held at the ACPA. Following his review, the Ombudsman opined that the Black Lives Matter banners should not have been placed on the exterior of the ACPA building. Placing a banner not related to an event being held at the ACPA, or that is not related to a Municipal program or initiative, could create a limited public forum. This would mean that the Municipality might have to allow almost any group to place banners espousing various positions and views on the ACPA building. The Municipality committed to placing the banners for 30 days; they were scheduled to come down on 10/03/20. The Ombudsman recommended that the banners be left in place for the entire 30 day commitment made by the Municipality, and that the ACPA banner policy be revised to clarify that only banners advertising events being held at the ACPA can be placed on the outside of the ACPA building. The Municipality's Legal Department worked with the ACPA board and staff to review their banner policy, and revised the banner policy to clarify that only banners advertising events being held at the ACPA can be placed on the outside of the building.

2020-1149, 2020-1346 & 2020-1353

A constituent contacted the Ombudsman, alleging that:

- 1) The Municipal Clerk's Office was "obstructing a legally valid and approved initiative by 1. improper notification 2. unreasonable fees". The complaint involved the Clerk's Office charging for additional copies of a recall petition
- 2) The Municipal Clerk's Office was placing "unwarranted and unnecessary hurdles" on the recall effort that the constituent was leading. He also alleged that the actions of the Clerk's Office were "unlawful". The constituent believed that not accepting electronic signatures for sponsor applicants for the recall petition violated state law.
- 3) The Municipal Clerk's Office unnecessarily delayed the confirmation of an additional sponsor for a current recall petition.

After reviewing documents related to the constituent's concerns, obtaining clarifying information from

the complainant, interviewing staff from the Clerk's Office, and reviewing the relevant State Statutes and Municipal Code, the Ombudsman determined that:

1) The Clerk's Office had provided the constituent with 900 petition pages, free of charge. This was enough pages to collect more than twice as many signatures as required to advance the petition. The constituent requested an additional 4,000 petition pages, which the Clerk's Office charged him for, using the formula in AMC and AMCR 3.90. The state statute that governs recalls is silent as to whether clerks' offices may charge recall petition sponsors to produce and copy petition pages. However, both State Statute and Municipal Code recognize that government agencies may set limits as to the number of documents that they will provide free of charge. The Ombudsman informed the constituent that he believed that the actions of the Clerk's Office were fair and reasonable and did not circumvent the intent of the recall statute.

2) The constituent cited of Alaska's "Uniform Electronic Transactions Act", which states that a signature cannot be rejected simply because it is electronic. However, the constituent overlooked Section 09.80.020.a & b, which states that the UETA does not require that government agencies must accept electronic signatures, and that acceptance of electronic signatures requires two-party agreement. State statute requires the signature and residence address of municipal voters who will sponsor a recall petition. (AS 29.26.260). The Clerk's Office verifies the name, address, and signature against the applicant's state voter registration file to confirm the applicant's identity and that they are a qualified municipal voter. The Ombudsman concluded that the Clerk's Office process did not place unwarranted and unnecessary hurdles on the recall effort and did not violate state law. Rather, the processes of the Clerk's Office appeared to be part of their effort to ensure the integrity of the process.

3) The Deputy Clerk - Elections acknowledged that one sponsor application form had "fallen through the cracks and took longer to process than it should have". The Deputy Clerk had apologized for the delay in an email to the person who submitted the form. The Ombudsman could not find any evidence to show that the delay was caused by anything other than human error. The constituent acknowledged that 228 sponsor forms had been processed in a timely manner by the Clerk's Office.

2020-1212

A constituent contacted the Ombudsman's Office, alleging that his neighbor used a gas leaf blower to blow snow throughout the day and night. The constituent stated that he has filed noise complaints with the Anchorage Health Department, the Anchorage Police Department, and the Municipal Right of Way Division. The constituent alleged that the Departments had failed to remedy the excessive noise complaints that he had filed over the years. The Departments had all determined, when responding to the constituent's complaints, that there were no violations of Municipal Code that would allow them to take any enforcement action. The constituent noted that Municipal Code prohibits noise above 60db across property lines in residential neighborhoods.

The Ombudsman reviewed the case files for the complaints filed with the Health Department and Right of Way, reviewed relevant documents, and the relevant sections of Municipal Code. The Ombudsman also reviewed the 40+ year legislative history of the relevant noise code sections. Municipal Code allows persons to legally use "domestic power tools" for non-commercial purposes between the hours of 7 am - 10 pm, without the 60dB maximum across property line standard applying to that use. No Municipal department

or agency can issue a citation, notice of violation or ticket to any resident of the Municipality, absent any violation of Municipal Code. If the constituent's neighbor uses his leaf blower between the hours of 10 PM – 7 AM, and the use is reported and documented, the Anchorage Health Department will take appropriate action.



2020 PUBLIC OUTREACH

In 2020 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 (limited due to the COVID – 19 global health pandemic, as was in-person outreach).

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 & MAY RAMIREZ-XIONG

It is our honor to serve the people of Anchorage as your Municipal Ombudsman and Deputy 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



COMPLAINT FORM

The Ombudsman's Office was established in addition to other remedies or rights of appeal, as an independent, impartial municipal office, readily available to the public, responsible to the Assembly, empowered to investigate the acts of Municipal agencies and Anchorage School District, 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.

Please fill out and mail to: Municipal Ombudsman
PO Box 196650
Anchorage, AK 99519-6650

Name		Date
Address		
City	State	Zip
Phone Number	Alt. Phone Number	
Email Address:		
Name of municipal department you are complaining about:		
Have you tried to resolve the complaint with the department? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO		
<div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> *It is important to try to resolve your issue with the agency's help before involving the Ombudsman.* </div>		
Please provide names and contact information for people you have spoken with and what their response was to your complaint.		

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. _____

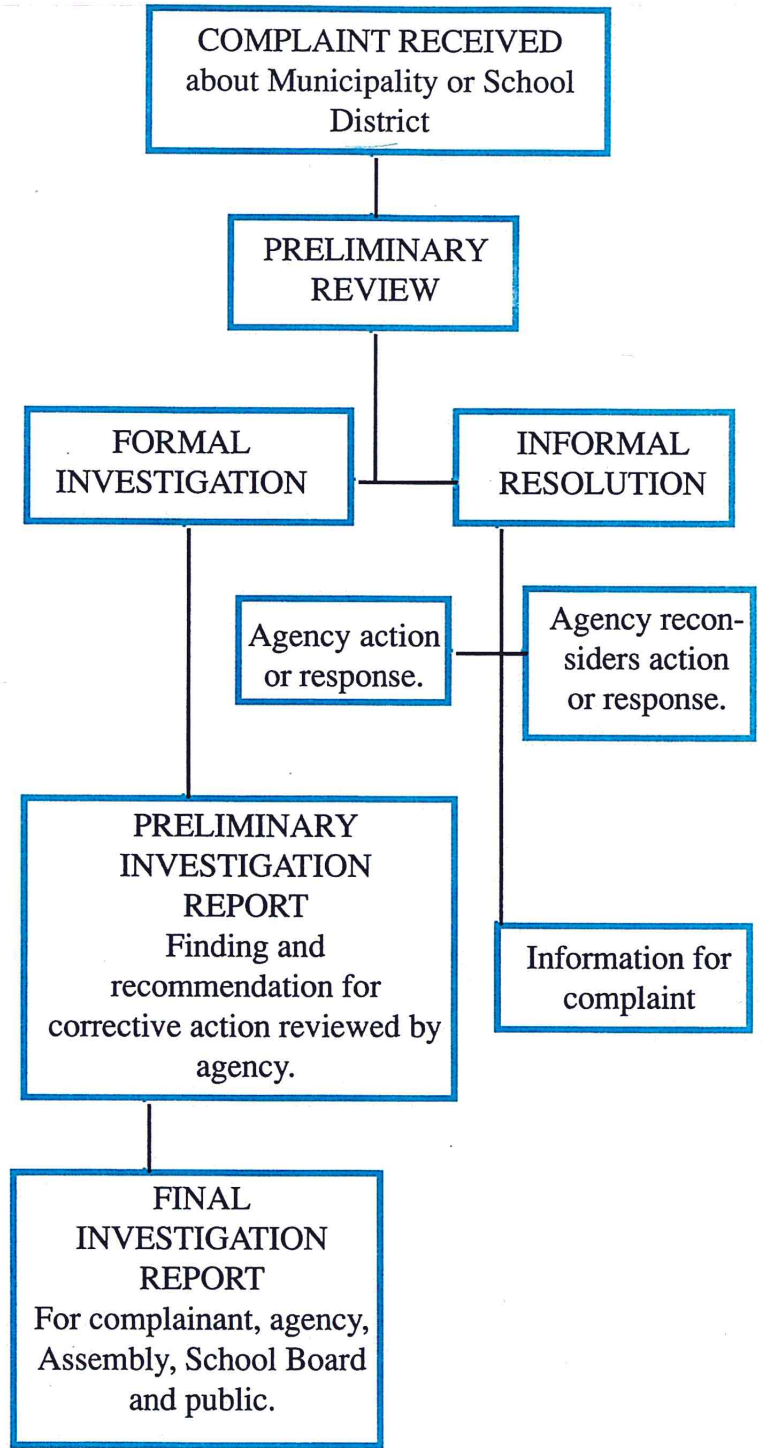
***IMPORTANT We will not give out your name without your consent. Do you give permission to use your name when talking to the agency?** **YES** **NO** Initial _____

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 TIGGER,
THE OMBUDSDOG**

FYI



MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE OMBUDSMAN

632 W 6th Avenue, Suite 100, Anchorage, AK 99501
343-4461 • ombud@muni.org



Street Maintenance: 343-8277

Code Enforcement: 343-4141

Potholes: 343-6363

Street Light Repair: 343-4557

Graffiti Busters: 343-4663

Animal Care & Control: 343-8122

Police Department: 786-8500

Fire Department: 267-4936

People Mover: 343-6543

Parks & Recreation: 343-4355

Mayor's Office: 343-7100

Municipal Manager: 343-7110

Clerk's Office: 343-4311

Equal Rights: 343-4342

Equal Opportunity: 343-4878

PLANNING: 343-7931

AWWU: 564-2700

Solid Waste: 343-6262

School District: 742-4000

APD Traffic Tip Line: 786-8949

State Ombudsman: 269-5290



Vote at Home Information



Secure Drop Box Locations:
muni.org/elections/dropbox

Frequently Asked Questions:
muni.org/electionsFAQ

**Anchorage Vote Center
Hours and Locations:**
muni.org/elections/AVC

Voter Hotline:
907-243-VOTE (8683)

Elections Info:
muni.org/elections

For More Information:

Web:
muni.org/elections

Facebook:
[@ANCMuniClerk](https://www.facebook.com/ANCMuniClerk)

Twitter:
[@AncMuniClerk](https://twitter.com/AncMuniClerk)

Call:
(907)243-VOTE(8683)

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:
Reeve, Krista, 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