OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN 2014 ANNUAL REPORT



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June 23, 2015

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 2014 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

Elizabeth A. Eisses

Deputy Ombudsman

Heather MacAlpine

Associate Ombudsman



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.

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 2014, the Ombudsman's Office provided information and referrals to over 1,100 individuals.

The Ombudsman's Office is located on the ground floor of Anchorage City Hall, in Suite 160. You can also find a Complaint form online on the Ombudsman webpage at www.muni.org/ombudsman. Complaints can also 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

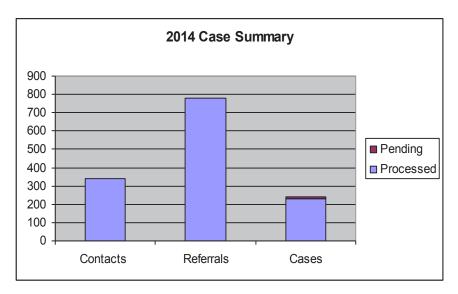
The Ombudsman's Office uses an application called "CityView" to maintain information and process statistics. The number of **Inquiries** listed in **Table 1** and **Graph 1** indicate the total number of public interactions with the Ombudsman's Office in 2014, either by telephone, email, postal mail, fax, or inperson. **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. 2014 Processing Statistics

2014 Processing Statistics	Opened in 2014	Processed or Closed	Pending
Referrals	782	782	0
Contacts	338	338	0
Cases	229	232*	11
Total Inquiries	1349**	1352	11

^{*}includes cases opened in previous years

Graph 1. 2014 Processing Statistics



^{**}This number reflects a 49% increase over 2013

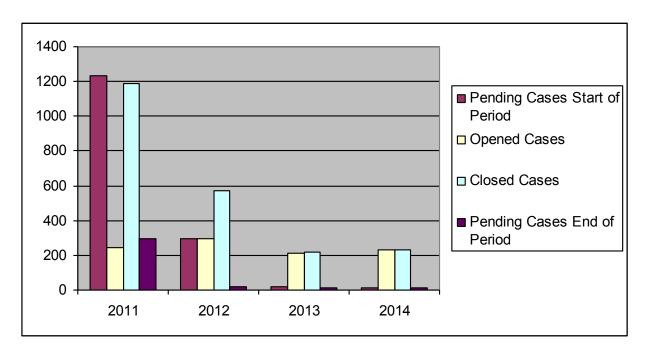


Table 2 and **Graph 2** reflect the work of the Ombudsman's Office over the past four years. The large numbers of open cases reflected in the 2011 and 2012 statistics have all been closed.

Table 2. Case Closures and Pending Inventory from 2011-14

Case Inventory	2011	2012	2013	2014
Pending Cases Start of Period	1236	293	21	14
Opened Cases	247	297	212	229
Closed Cases	1190	569	219	232
Pending Cases End of Period	293	21	14	11

Graph 2. Case Closures and Pending Inventory from 2011-2014



Historically, the larger Municipal Departments and those with the greatest public contact generate the largest number of cases in the Ombudsman's Office. In 2014 Community Development (21%), the Police Department (14%), Public Works (13%), Finance (11%) and Health & Human Services (9%) ranked 1-5. (See Table 3 and Graph 3)

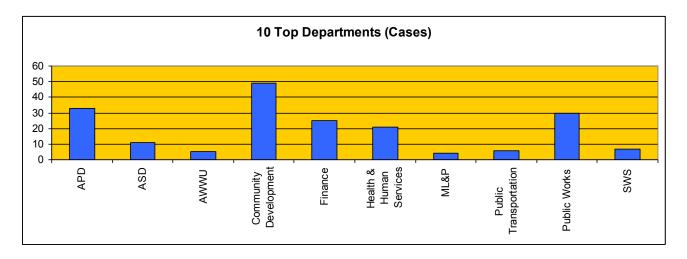


Table 3. 2012-2014 Cases by Department

Department	2012	Percent	2013	Percent	2014	Percent
Anchorage Community Development Authority	10	3%	11	5%	4	2%
Assembly	11	4%	0	0%	0	0%
Community Development	52	18%	46	22%	49	21%
Employee Relations	3	1%	2	1%	3	1%
Finance Department	0	0%	18	9%	25	11%
Fire Department	2	1%	0	0%	1	0.5%
Health & Human Services	22	7%	11	5%	21	9%
Information Technology	2	1%	0	0%	0	0%
Legal Department	9	3%	6	3%	3	1%
Library	1	0.5%	2	1%	0	0%
Mayor's Office	0	0%	3	1%	1	0.5%
Merrill Field	0	0%	0	0%	1	0.5%
Municipal Light & Power	0	0%	1	0.5%	4	2%
Municipal Manager	0	0%	1	0.5%	1	0.5%
Not Department Specific	34	11%	4	2%	10	4%
Office of Equal Opportunity	2	1%	0	0%	1	0.5%
Parks & Recreation	3	1%	9	4%	6	3%
Police Department	41	14%	27	13%	33	14%
Port of Anchorage	1	0.5%	0	0%	1	0.5%
Public Transportation	12	4%	4	2%	6	3%
Public Works	46	15%	28	13%	30	13%
Purchasing Department	2	1%	2	1%	0	0%
Real Estate Department	4	1%	1	0.5%	2	1%
Risk Management	3	1%	4	2%	1	0.5%
School District	21	7%	12	5%	11	5%
Solid Waste Services	7	2%	9	4%	7	3%
Transportation Inspection	5	2%	4	2%	3	1%
Water & Wastewater Utility	4	1%	7	3%	5	2%
All Departments	297	100%	212	100%	229	100%



Graph 3. 2014 Cases by Department (most frequent)



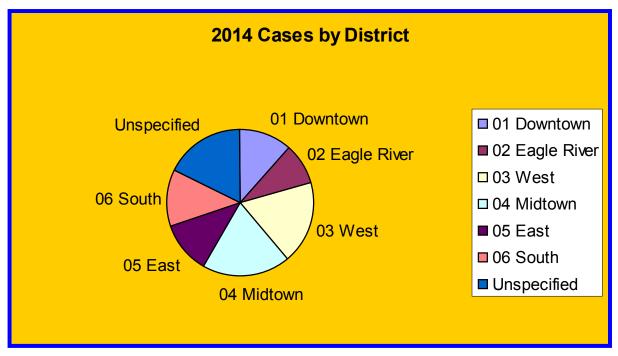
The Ombudsman's Office also tracks Cases by Assembly District. These numbers are reflected in **Table 4** and **Graph 4**.

Table 4. Cases by Assembly District 2012-2014

District No./Name	Cases 2012	Percent	Cases 2013	Percent	Cases 2014	Percent
00 Not District Specific	0	0	3	1.43	1	0.44
01 Downtown	40	13.47	43	20.48	27	11.79
02 Eagle River/Chugiak	20	6.73	21	10	21	9.17
03 West Anchorage	58	19.53	32	15.24	41	17.9
04 Midtown	39	13.13	36	17.14	44	19.21
05 East Anchorage	42	14.14	28	13.33	26	11.35
06 South Anchorage	46	15.49	28	13.33	29	12.66
77 Out of Anchorage	0	0	1	0.48	5	2.18
99 District Unknown	52	17.51	20	8.57	35	15.28
Total	297	100	212	100	229	100



Graph 4. Cases by Assembly District 2014



2014 FINAL INVESTIGATIVE REPORT SUMMARIES

In 2014 the Ombudsman's Staff issued several Final Investigative Reports as authorized by the Municipal Code. Below are summaries of some of those reports:

Final Investigative Report Concerning Ombudsman Complaint 0M2130218

A married couple contacted the Ombudsman's Office stating that their home had burned in 2012, and alleging that they were not informed about the Municipality's Disaster Tax Relief program. Investigation by the Deputy Ombudsman revealed that the informational booklet provided to the couple by the Anchorage Fire Department was out of date and did not contain any reference to the tax relief program. Investigation also revealed that information about the tax relief program was difficult to locate on muni. org. This case prompted AFD to update and reprint the booklet, "After the Fire ... We Continue to Serve." Because the Disaster Tax Relief application was not available on the Municipality of Anchorage's Property Appraisal website, and because information about the program was not included in the "After the Fire..." booklet provided by the Anchorage Fire Department, the Ombudsman found the complaint that the property owners were not informed of the Disaster Tax Relief Program by the Municipality to be JUSTIFIED. The Property Appraisal Division updated their website making the Disaster Reassessment Application available online, and listed the disaster abatement program on the back of the 2015 Real Property Appraisal cards. The Anchorage Fire Department updated their booklet to include information regarding the Disaster Tax Relief Program, and posted the updated booklet on their webpage.



Final Investigative Report Concerning Ombudsman Complaint OM20140032

A married couple contacted the Ombudsman's Office in January 2014. They had been married for 33 years, and had recently visited the Municipal Property Appraisal Division to file for a senior citizen property tax exemption when the husband turned 65. They alleged that they were informed that in order to receive the full exemption which married couples are entitled to, even if only one of them is over 65 years of age, they would have to provide a copy of their marriage certificate, because they had different last names. The complainants questioned this requirement, since it was not listed on the application form, application instructions, or on the Division's webpage. The complainants believed that it was not fair that couples in certain groups, i.e. "non-traditional" marriages (different last names and same sex couples) had to produce a copy of their marriage license, rather than self-certify their spousal information, like the vast majority of applicants. Because the Municipal Assessor is given considerable discretion and latitude regarding documentation required for Municipal senior citizen property tax exemptions, and because the current policy was to require married couples with different last names and same-sex couples to provide copies of their marriage certificates when applying for an exemption, while married couples with the same last name were generally allowed to selfcertify spousal information, the Ombudsman found the complaint that the policy was not fair and reasonable to be JUSTIFIED. Based on the Ombudsman's recommendation the Property Appraisal Division revised their policy to generally allow ALL married couples to self-certify spousal information.

Final Investigative Report Concerning Ombudsman Complaint 0M20140345

The general manager of a local tow company contacted the Ombudsman's Office, regarding the Anchorage Police Department's Rotational Tow Program. The manager alleged that he had attempted to sign his company up to participate in the program, but was told that the program was limited to seven companies, and that "no additional companies are needed at this time". The complainant noted that nowhere in the program document, "Municipality of Anchorage APD Rotational Tow Program" does it state that the number of participants is limited to only seven tow companies. The complainant believed that it was unfair to "lock" his company, and other companies out of the program, while "locking in" the seven participating companies. When inquiring into this complaint, the Ombudsman considered not only what was legal, but what was fair. Is it fair to lock some companies into a Municipal program, while locking other qualified companies out of the program? The Ombudsman believes that local government has an obligation to not only follow the law, rules, regulations and codes, but to also strive to be fair and equitable. Sometimes, it is difficult to balance needs and process with fairness. While the Rotational Tow Program provides benefits to the public and to the Municipality, the Ombudsman believed that creating two classes of tow companies, the "ins" and the "outs", was not fair and equitable. Because the APD Rotational Tow Program guarantees participating tow companies that they will be called out by APD hundreds of times a year, and because the program locked some companies into the program, while locking others out, the Ombudsman found the structure of the program to



be inherently unfair and this complaint to be JUSTIFIED. APD agreed that the APD Rotational Tow Program Guidelines did not address adding or deleting companies, the maximum number of companies allowed, nor performance measures or open enrollment. APD agreed to modify the program to address these concerns.

2014 INFORMAL RESOLUTION SUMMARIES

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 those cases:

Ombudsman Complaint 0M20140083

A widow, whose husband died in a military plane crash in Anchorage in 1995, contacted the Ombudsman's Office after she was denied a municipal property tax exemption she believed that she was eligible for. The State of Alaska passed SB 73 in 2013 which allows a municipal property tax exemption for the widow or widower of a person who dies from a service-connected cause while serving as a member of the United States armed forces or as a member of the National Guard. AMC 12.15.015 authorized the exemption for Municipality of Anchorage property owners. *The Ombudsman provided relevant documents to the Property Appraisal Division, and they verified the widow's eligibility and processed her application for the Military Service Widow/Widower property tax exemption.*

Ombudsman Complaint OM20140660

An individual purchased two tax foreclosed properties from the Municipality in April 2014. He later received a bill from the Municipality for the property taxes for the entire 2014 tax year. He believed that he should not be responsible for the property taxes for the time frame that the Municipality owned the properties. He requested that the Municipality show him in writing where it says that he was responsible for the property taxes for the entire year. Investigation by the Ombudsman revealed that the Municipality does not prorate property taxes when disposing of or acquiring property. For private real estate transactions the buyer and seller reach an agreement regarding payment of property taxes as part of the transaction. The Ombudsman's review of the Real Estate Department's webpage, Foreclosure Guide, and Purchase Agreement revealed that the fact that purchasers of tax foreclosed properties in the Municipality are responsible for the entire year's property taxes, including the time that the Municipality owned the properties, was not disclosed on the webpage or in the documents. The Ombudsman believed that the Municipality had a responsibility to disclose this requirement to potential purchasers. *In this case, the purchaser and the Municipality reached an agreement; the Municipality paid the purchaser an amount equal to the property taxes for the time frame that they owned the two tax foreclosed properties in 2014. The Real Estate Department modified all relevant documents and their web page to disclose the fact*



that purchasers of tax foreclosed properties are responsible for payment of the entire year's property tax bill for the year that they purchase properties.

Ombudsman Complaint 0M20140883

A local non-profit organization entered into a long term lease with the Municipality in 2009, agreeing to maintain a section of land and make it accessible to the public in exchange for tenancy on the property. In 2014 the President of the non-profit contacted the Ombudsman's Office reporting that they were in receipt of a substantial bill for past due property taxes and fees, and stating the organization did not have the resources to pay the bill. The President avowed the organization is a state registered "charitable organization" providing a public service and had been under the impression that property taxes would not be assessed due to their contract with the Municipality. Investigation by the Associate Ombudsman unraveled the history of the contract and determined that a series of unforeseen events and mutual oversights had contributed to the current situation. The organization submitted the appropriate paperwork to establish tax exempt status going forward, and the Department cleared the account, ensuring that the mutually beneficial arrangement will continue into the future.

Ombudsman Complaint 0M20140975

A "lifelong Alaskan" contacted the Ombudsman's office stating that when he had sold a rental property in 2008 it had somehow resulted in the loss of his residential property tax exemption for the house he was living in. He had been unaware of the mistake until the present year when he had gone to pay his taxes and been informed he was "not a resident". The Department helped guide him through the appeal process. After careful review of the situation the Department issued both an apology for the inadvertent error and a refund, with interest included, covering the loss of the exemption for the affected years.

Ombudsman Complaint 0M20141083

A mobility-impaired person contacted the Ombudsman's office concerned that he had been informed he could not utilize his Segway motorized scooter in the Dena'ina Center where he had some work planned. Online research by the Associate Ombudsman located a document recently released by the US Department of Justice addressing the issue and clarifying that compliance with the American with Disabilities Act requires that "entities must allow people with disabilities who use manual or power wheelchairs or scooters, and manually-powered mobility aids such as walkers, crutches, and canes, into all areas where members of the public are allowed to go." *The General Manager of the facility was very receptive to the information and stated he would address the issue promptly by internal training of all staff informing them of the allowable use of Segways in Anchorage's Dena'ina and Egan Convention Centers.*

Ombudsman Complaint 0M20141238

An individual stated that he had inquired of the Anchorage School District Superintendent why the ASD does not provide disaggregated achievement and school characteristics data for the non-gifted and highly



gifted programs at Rogers Park Elementary School. He believed that it was important to disaggregate the data so that parents and the public are aware of the achievement level of the mainstream students at the school. The individual believed that the ASD, in responding, did not adequately answer the question. In their response, the ASD stated that they cannot provide the requested data because the ASD does not currently collect and disaggregate the data for programs within schools, such as the Highly Gifted Program at Rogers Park Elementary School. Investigation by the Ombudsman revealed that there is no statutory requirement for the ASD to disaggregate the requested data. The complainant was advised to work with his community council to petition the ASD Board of Education to change the policy, if he believed that the ASD should be disaggregating the data. The complainant worked with his community council, drafted a petition to the ASD School Board, and gathered over 40 signatures for the petition. He presented the petition to the School Board, which accepted the petition and adopted disaggregating the data as an ASD Policy.

2014 PUBLIC OUTREACH

In 2014 the Ombudsman's Office worked to improve the office's interface with the public, including;

- Initiating development of a City View Public Portal that will allow citizens to file complaints online. The portal will be optimized for smart phones and tablets.
- Continuing to update and make effective use of the Ombudsman's page at <u>www.muni.org/ombuds.</u>
- 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:
 - NAACP Anchorage Installation of Officers
 - ➤ The Federation of Community Councils
 - ➤ Catholic Social Services Refugee Assistance & Immigration Services Partners Meetings
 - Bridge Builder's Meet the World in Anchorage
 - Polynesian Community Conversation with Senator Lisa Murkowski
 - ➤ NAACP Black History Month Celebration & Voter Registration Drive
 - > YWCA Alaska Opening Minds and Hearts Social Justice Dialogues
 - > 90% by 2020 Graduation Party & Rally
 - ➤ Ida'ina 2014 Gathering



- Hmong American Veterans Memorial Day Celebration
- Ford Motor Company Fund's Unsung Heroes Dinner & Reception
- YWCA 2014 Young People of Achievement
- Go Blue Day Rally
- 4th of July Naturalization Ceremony
- Japanese Summer Festival
- > YWCA Women of Achievement Reception and Induction Ceremony
- Hispanic Heritage Day Celebration
- Stopped by Police? Community Forum at UAA
- YWCA: Women's Equality Day Kick-Off
- Texas 4000 Welcoming Reception at UAA
- Filipino Community Picnic
- YWCA: Honoring our Women Veteran's
- 2014 Urban in Alaska: Imagine Town Square Park
- > Leadership Anchorage
- Stop the Violence March in Mt. View
- Identity, Inc. Board
- Asia-Pacific Heritage Month Celebration
- NeighborWorks Anchorage Paint the Town Celebration
- 2014 PrideFest Town Square Kick-Off, 2014 Equality March & 2014 PrideFestival
- CSS/RAIS World Refugee Day Celebration
- Southcentral Foundation's 17th Annual Gathering
- > Bean's Café 20th Annual Empty Bowl Project



- Senator Ellis/Representative Tarr Constituent Meeting
- Senator Ellis/Representative Gara Constituent Meeting
- Alaska Legal Services Housing & Renter's Workshop
- Choose Respect March and Rally
- Pista Sa Nayon 2014
- Polynesian Cultural Flag Day 2014
- Project Homeless Connect
- Community Forum on Police Use of Force
- ➤ Panel Discussion on Youth Homelessness at St Anthony's Parish
- Chinese New Year's Celebration: Year of the Horse
- One Anchorage/One Economy Initiative
- Mountain View Street Fair
- Reconstructing Housing Panel Discussion
- ➤ The Faces of Segregation (UAA Bookstore)
- ➤ NAACP CT Lewis Freedom Fund Dinner
- Alaska Native Heritage Day Celebration





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 citizens 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 2014 the Municipal Ombudsman's Office recognized Judy Tymick and Lance Wilber with the Public Transportation Department, and Eric Jonson and Karen Seda with Anchorage Animal Care & Control, with the Ombudsman's Above and Beyond Award, in recognition of their commitment to delivering superior customer service to the people of Anchorage.



Lance Wilber, Judy Tymick, and Darrel Hess



Betsy Eisses, Eric Jonson, and Karen Seda



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

In the 92-93 Ombudman's Annual Report, Rosa Garner put together this piece and we thought 2014 was a good time to update it. It was a pleasure to connect with this amazing group of public servants!

Joel DeVore 1974-1978

After serving as the Municipality of Anchorage's first Ombudsman, Joel moved to Oregon where he earned his law degree from the University of Oregon School of Law in 1982. Joel practiced law in Pendleton and Eugene, Oregon. Joel was appointed to the Oregon Court of Appeals in 2013.

"The insight of the Anchorage Borough, soon the unified Municipality of Anchorage, to engage an ombudsman to troubleshoot for citizens over forty years ago remains remarkable. Credit the Assembly for creating the ombudsman role. Thank the patient cooperation of each municipal department in responding to the ombudsman's persistence. Thank each citizen who set aside the frustration of the moment to trust the ombudsman to look for a better answer or ferret out a solution."

Karla Forsythe 1978-1980

After leaving the Ombudsperson's Office, Karla was General Council for the Alaska Court System. She was also Executive director for the Alaska Public Offices Commission. In 1990, Karla moved to Oregon and recently retired as Chief Administrative Law Judge for the State of Oregon.

"Out of all my previous jobs, the ombuds position was the best. I really enjoyed the combination of helping people and learning about how the Municipality functions – both operationally and politically."

Wayne Mabry 1981-1983

Wayne's business, TLC was the contractor for Animal Care and Control from 1984 through 1997. After "retiring" he continues to run a financial/business consulting firm. Wayne resides in Anchorage.

"Being Ombudsman was an extremely satisfying job because 99% of the time you can solve the problem presented to everyone's satisfaction. I found it difficult to impossible, however, to change the government system that created the problem."

Michael Mills 1984-1991

Michael returned to Oregon as Dispute Resolution Coordinator for the natural resource agencies with the Oregon Dispute Resolution Commission. He was appointed as the city of Portland's first Ombudsman in 1993 and twice served as President of the U.S. Ombudsman Association. Michael is currently the Project Manager for Oregon Solutions at the Hatfield School of Government, Portland State University.

"Serving as Ombudsman for the Municipality of Anchorage was an experience I will hold as one of my most valuable for the rest of my life. It offered me the highest rewards as well as the greatest of frustrations."



Rosa Garner 1993-1996

Rosa just retired in January, 2015 as Ombuds Emerita, after serving the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health for 17 years. Rosa lives in Madison, Wisconsin and is looking forward to visiting Anchorage this summer.

"For me, the privilege of serving in an Ombuds role for over 25 years, first in Alaska and finally for the UW-Madison, always centered on the one-on-one connections with the people. Learning about individual experiences and aspirations while exploring opportunities for communication and action to promote fairness within the institution made every day rewarding."

Alan Muise 1997-2003

After leaving the Ombudsman's office, Alan volunteered as a mediator for the small claims court in Anchorage. Alan continues to live in Anchorage and currently is the director for the Holy Spirit center, a retreat and conference facility belonging to the Archdiocese of Anchorage.

"Being Ombudsman was an enlightening experience. Learning the workings of the Municipality made me a better citizen and allowed me to understand and assist other citizens with their issues. You can't make everyone happy with complaint resolution, but you should be able to make sure that they were satisfied with a fair response."

Greg Moyer 2003-2006

Greg left MOA in September, 2006 after over 20 years with the Municipality. He then moved to Oklahoma and taught middle school English for 5 years. Recently, he returned to Alaska and served as City Manager for Galena and Interim City Manager of Bethel. Greg currently lives in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma.

"Looking back on my career, being the Anchorage Ombudsman was the best position I ever held. It was an honor for me to work every day with the citizens of Anchorage and Municipal/School District personnel to solve problems and concerns."

Kristi Cada 2007-2010

After working for the Municipality of Anchorage since 1989, with a brief stint living and working in Valdez, Kristi left the Ombudsman's Office in December, 2010. Kristi continued working for the Assembly Department as an Assembly Aide to Assembly Member Paul Honeman for four years. In January, 2015, Kristi finished her MBA, with the same emphasis as her bachelor's degree; Knowledge Management and Conflict Resolution. In April, 2015 Kristi was recruited to help a friend develop and run a specialty catering delivery service that focuses on specialty dietary needs, including vegan, vegetarian, paleo, pescatarian, ketogenic, and just plain calorie-controlled meals for those looking to trim down.

"I've always been a strong believer in fair and equal treatment for all, so it was a pleasure to work in the Ombudsman's Office, where fairness and mutual respect sought to rule the day. While complainant concerns



sometimes illuminated improvements to be made within Municipal policies, procedures and processes, I took every opportunity to shed light upon and show appreciation for the hard-working employees of the Municipality. Not only did I find them to be some of the most dedicated individuals I've worked with, but also some of the most compassionate, patient and respectful, even when faced with provocation and adversity. Municipal employees continue to play a critical role in making the Municipality of Anchorage the wonderful place it is to live, work and play."

Barbara Jones 2011-2012

Barbara came to the Ombudsman's Office after serving as Staff Attorney and Executive Director of the Anchorage Equal Rights Commission for 12 years. During her tenure in the Ombudsman's Office, the Assembly offered and appointed Barbara as Municipal Clerk, where she continues to serve the Municipality and the Assembly.

"When I was working as the Ombudsman, my then 12-year old son asked me what would be the perfect job and I responded that I had the perfect job! Working as the Ombudsman allowed me the privilege both to direct citizens to hard working city employees who could solve problems, and to address issues that were problematic for citizens that departments may not have understood from the citizens' perspective. It was a privilege to serve."





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 of 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



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 Numb	per
Email Address:		
Name of municipal department you are complaining abo	out:	
Have you tried to resolve the complaint with the departn	nent?	
*It is important to try to resolve your issue	e with the agency's hel	p before involving the ombudsman.
Please provide names and contact information for peop	le you have spoken with a	nd 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 may the assembly or school board." AMC 2.60.110.A. D	or,
the assembly or school board." AMC 2.60.110.A. D What did the department do that you think is wrong?	
What did the department do that yed 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 u	se
your name when talking to the agency?	
Use this space to provide any further information you feel may be useful in our investigation. Remembe	r:
The Municipal Ombudsman only investigates complaints about municipal agencies. Use extra pa	ıper
if necessary.	
What do you want the Ombudsman to do for you?	
Signature Date	

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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

Darrel W. Hess, Municipal Ombudsman
Elizabeth A. Eisses, Deputy Ombudsman
Heather MacAlpine, Associate Ombudsman



Heather, Darrel and Betsy



A very special thanks to the Municipal Reprographics Team, Ruth, Bob, Tiny and Brandon, for their professionalism and invaluable assistance.