

OFFICE OF THE  
HYDRO ONE OMBUDSMAN

# ANNUAL REPORT

# 2023





## Land Acknowledgement

The Office of the Hydro One Ombudsman acknowledges that it is located on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, the Haudenosaunee, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, the Métis, and the Huron Wendat Nation. The Office of the Hydro One Ombudsman also acknowledges that these lands are covered by Treaty 13 signed by the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

The Office of the Hydro One Ombudsman delivers its services to people across the province, and acknowledges that the greater lands of Ontario are enveloped by the history of many Indigenous Nations including the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Algonquins, Attawandaron, Huron-Wendat, Métis, and the Inuit.

The Office of the Hydro One Ombudsman believes in the pursuit of True Reconciliation and recognizes that this pursuit begins with a commitment to friendship and partnership with Indigenous Nations. We also understand that Indigenous Nations have been the caretakers of Turtle Island since time immemorial, which is why we are thankful to operate from these lands as partners in our combined future and as peers among the many diverse Indigenous Peoples who still call these lands home today.

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# Message from the Ombudsman



Sophie Petrillo  
Hydro One Ombudsman

**This report presents the Office of the Hydro One Ombudsman's results for the fiscal period of January 1, 2023 – December 31, 2023, in accordance with section 48.3 of the *Electricity Act, 1998*. It also provides valuable information about how we operate and how customers and members of the public can access our free dispute resolution services.**

The first Ombudsman's office in Canada opened its doors for business at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia in 1965. In the subsequent 60 years, Ombudsman offices have become more commonplace. Many provinces, territories, municipalities, universities, government departments, banks, and companies have created their own Ombudsman offices to help ensure that the organizations they oversee are held accountable and the people they interact with are treated fairly. Hydro One joined these ranks in 2016, and despite my Office now entering our eighth year of operation, what we do still appears for many to be shrouded in mystery.

Meeting with people and sharing information about how we can help is an important part of my role as Ombudsman. Without lifting the veil and effectively communicating what my Office does, the values that guide our work, and how we operate, my Office would not be able to help as many people as we do. In 2023, I spoke to hundreds of Hydro One employees to better explain how my Office should be seen as a partner that can help them learn from their customers' experiences. At the other end of the spectrum, every time my team or I speaks to a complainant, we want to make sure that they know what we can do to help them and how we will do it.

Throughout 2023, my Office handled 878 complaints, an increase of 18 per cent over last year. This increase was almost entirely attributable to increased complaints about power quality, outages and Hydro One's connection process. These are not new issues for Hydro One – they have been pain points for customers for several years.

While progress is being made to address the root causes of these complaints, the underlying issues are complex and require significant investments by Hydro One in improved training, tools, and processes. None of these things can be done overnight, rather these are large, multi-year projects. As an oversight office, we are here to ensure that Hydro One remains committed to resolving these issues and make continuous improvements towards eliminating these complaints.

Despite the increase in complaints, I am encouraged by Hydro One's continued willingness to listen and act on the feedback we provide. While Hydro One accepted all 43 recommendations made by my Office this year, formal recommendations are not always necessary to bring about change. More and more, meaningful conversations with the right people in the company are all that is needed to shine a light on a problem area that needs attention. The best outcome, in my opinion, is one where a complaint can be avoided altogether.

As the office of last resort, we receive complaints from people who have exhausted all other channels within Hydro One. We often speak with people who are tired, frustrated and emotional. To all those people who have taken the time to share their stories and who have looked for help, I thank you. I also want to thank all the Hydro One employees who willingly work with my Office to ensure the delivery of Hydro One's services in a fair and just manner. We will continue to help, to listen, and to do our best throughout 2024.

# About the Office

## Our Mandate

To facilitate the resolution of complaints that remain unresolved after having been through Hydro One's complaints handling process.

## Our Vision

Ensure Hydro One delivers just, fair, and equitable services to its customers and the public.

# Values

## FAIRNESS

Ensuring that Hydro One's services are delivered in a consistent manner, aligned with its regulatory obligations and the principles of natural justice. We examine what was decided, how it was decided, and how people were treated within the process.

## INDEPENDENCE

Operating at arm's length from Hydro One, we are free from undue influence when making recommendations based on our thorough investigations and determinations on what is fair and reasonable in the circumstances.

## IMPARTIALITY

Approaching every situation with an open mind, listening to what the complaint is, and allowing the facts to guide our work and outcomes. We are not advocates for either the complainant or the organization, instead we are champions of fairness.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Holding all communications with the Office securely and in the strictest of confidence, we only share information with the company if given consent.

## ACCESSIBILITY

We strive to make it as easy as possible to work with us by eliminating barriers to our free dispute resolution services. Our goal is to ensure that anyone who wants to work with us, can work with us.



# What is an Ombudsman?

The word “Ombudsman” is a non-gendered Scandinavian term that means “representative” or “proxy”. An Ombudsman is an individual who serves as a designated neutral within a specific organization, providing conflict resolution and problem-solving services for individuals affected by that organization. The principal concern of an Ombudsman is to ensure that organizations are acting fairly, and to shine light on issues of unfairness in an effort to resolve them.

## WHO WE ARE

The Office is led by the Ombudsman, Sophie Petrillo, and supported by a team of investigators who use their expertise to manage the complaint process from intake to resolution. All our services are free and confidential.

## WHAT WE DO

The Office acts as a last resort for complaints from anyone affected by Hydro One’s services, helping ensure Hydro One delivers just, fair and equitable services to its customers and the public.

## HOW WE DO IT

The Office is independent from the company’s management and operations, reporting directly to Hydro One’s Board of Directors through its Governance and Regulatory Committee. The ultimate goal is fairness for all parties.

# What Does Fairness Mean?

An Ombudsman views fairness from three perspectives.

## FAIR PROCESS

**How a decision was made**, including the process used by the decision-maker. This can include ensuring an opportunity to be heard, a decision made by an impartial decision-maker, and a timely decision with meaningful reasons.

Procedural

## FAIR DECISION

**What was decided**, including whether the facts and rules were properly applied to the circumstances. This can include ensuring the decision-maker had authority to make the decision, that it was based on relevant information, and in accordance with the right rules, laws or policies.

Substantive

Equitable

## FAIR TREATMENT

**How people were treated**, including whether any special characteristics of the complainant were considered. This can include ensuring the company took time to understand the concern, was respectful and courteous in its interactions, and honest and forthright in its responses.



# The Complaint Process

The Office of the Hydro One Ombudsman provides customers and members of the public with an office of last resort for complaints that remain unresolved after going through Hydro One's internal complaints process. The Office provides a way to raise concerns for anyone who believes they have been unfairly or unreasonably affected by Hydro One's actions or decisions.

## Step 1: Contacting Hydro One

The first step for any complaint is to raise it directly with Hydro One and go through its internal complaint process. If a complainant has not exhausted all of Hydro One's complaint process, we identify and refer the complaint to the right Hydro One staff who can attempt to address the issue. In some cases the Office may intervene earlier, particularly if there has already been delay from the company, the person is vulnerable, or it is just the right thing to do.

## Step 2: Understanding Hydro One's Response

If Hydro One makes a decision someone believes is unfair or unreasonable, the issue should be reviewed by a manager/supervisor or further escalated to the company's Customer Relations Centre. If there are any delays or problems escalating within Hydro One's complaint process, contact the Office.

## Step 3: Making a Complaint

If an issue remains unresolved after going through Hydro One's complaint process, or the final resolution appears unfair or unreasonable, the next step is to make a complaint to the Office. Complaints can be made via email, phone, regular mail, fax, or through the Office's website. All complaints are confidential.

## Step 4: Assessing the Complaint

A member of the Office reviews the details and contacts the complainant to learn more about their concerns. The complaint may be resolved by providing support, advice, or referring it to relevant external agencies or organizations. The Office may also resolve a complaint through its early resolution process, including through facilitating simple resolutions with the company where feasible.

## Step 5: Investigating the Complaint

If the complaint is more complex or requires additional research, the Office starts an investigation. After collecting and reviewing all relevant information, the Office determines if the complainant was treated fairly by the company. The Office may also decide to launch a systemic investigation if the underlying issue has the potential to impact a significant number of customers or the public.

## Step 6: Communicating the Findings

After concluding the investigation, the Office notifies the complainant of the outcome. Specifically, the Office shares its findings and conclusions, advises if any additional steps will be taken to resolve the complaint, and outlines if any recommendations were made to the company.



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Thank goodness for... the Ombudsman Office. I felt I was finally heard... and once my letter was received it seemed like action happened immediately.

— HYDRO ONE CUSTOMER

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# The Story in Numbers



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# 878

COMPLAINTS  
HANDLED

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WHO CONTACTS THE OFFICE?

**90%**  
RESIDENTIAL

**9%**  
COMMERCIAL

**1%**  
OTHER

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HOW THE PUBLIC CONTACTS US

**59%**  
PHONE

**39%**  
ONLINE

**2%**  
OTHER

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**100%**  
COMPLAINT  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT  
(WITHIN 2 DAYS)

**99.4%**  
COMPLAINT  
RESOLUTION  
(WITHIN 30 DAYS)

**100%**  
RECOMMENDATIONS  
ACCEPTED

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# Top Five Complaints Outside Our Jurisdiction

The Office of the Hydro One Ombudsman's jurisdiction includes complaints about Hydro One Limited and all of its subsidiaries.

In 2023, we received 93 complaints that were outside of our jurisdiction, representing 11 per cent of the overall complaints received. In cases where complaints are found to be outside of the Office's jurisdiction, we provide support and advice to those individuals on how to pursue their complaints further.

1

## OTHER UTILITIES

We cannot address complaints about other distribution companies or utilities.

2

## EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOUR

Complaints about specific employees are handled by Hydro One's Ethics Office.

3

## SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Electricity support programs like the Ontario Electricity Support Program are created by the Ontario Energy Board.

4

## INQUIRIES

We receive various inquiries unrelated to Hydro One, including from people looking for other Ombudsman offices.

5

## ELECTRICITY PRICES

Electricity prices are set by the Ontario Energy Board.

# How We Address Complaints

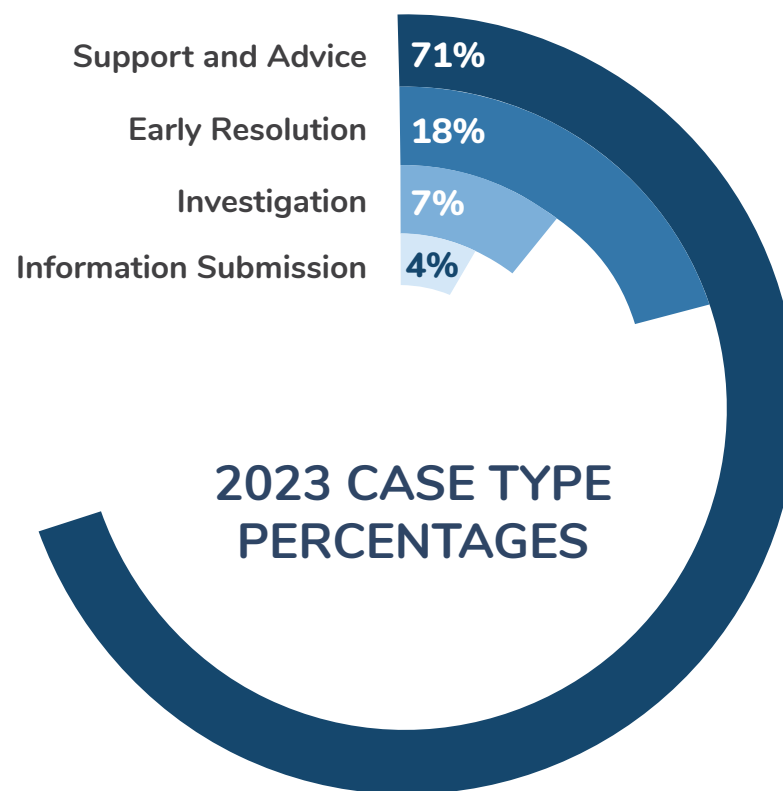
The Office of the Hydro One Ombudsman takes every complaint seriously. When someone contacts the Office, the goal is to identify what we can do to help.

Wherever possible, complaints are addressed through the early resolution process. By providing answers and information, or engaging in informal discussions with the company, many complaints can be resolved quickly and effectively.

However, where complaints are more complex or involve potential systemic issues, we typically conduct an individual investigation. Regardless of whether a complaint goes through our early resolution process or a full investigation, the Office still provides Hydro One with recommendations to address any unfairness found and reports these outcomes directly to the complainant.

If a complaint is premature or falls outside the Office's mandate, we still do our best to provide the support and advice the complainant needs to move it forward. Sometimes it is referring them to the right person within Hydro One, and other times to the right external organization.

Occasionally, the Office receives information submissions from the public that are not attached to a specific complaint. We track these comments and, where appropriate, report on them to the Governance and Regulatory Committee of the Board of Directors.





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**I appreciate the Office being current on the trends in the company and that they take a measured approach to solving issues.**

— HYDRO ONE EMPLOYEE

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# Our Impact

The Office works diligently to establish a collaborative working relationship with Hydro One. From frontline staff working in the field, to the executives working in head office, our ability to have candid conversations about what we hear from complainants and what we discover during our investigations, allows us to provide reasonable, practical, and actionable recommendations to improve Hydro One for the benefit of its customers, shareholders, and the public.

The recommendations we make often aim to address the specific unfairness experienced by an individual, but may also lead to recommendations for system-wide improvements that can affect many.

In 2023, the Office made recommendations in 34 cases, resulting in a total of 43 recommendations – all of which were accepted by the company. Examples of these recommendations include:

- ◆ Reconsidering denied damage claims, including those instances where Hydro One had not followed its own processes or where the original decision failed to take into account relevant evidence.
- ◆ Providing service credits for customers where Hydro One failed to meet its own service standards, missed scheduled appointments, or provided incorrect or confusing responses to customer inquiries.
- ◆ Reconnecting a tenanted building where the circumstances warranted the tenants not being without power in the winter.
- ◆ Providing tree vouchers where trees were improperly removed by Hydro One.
- ◆ Special vegetation management to avoid demonstrated interference with a specific crop.
- ◆ Clarifying aspects of Hydro One's internal claims adjudication process.
- ◆ Ensuring the monitoring and maintenance of specific equipment to prevent malfunctions which could lead to property damage.
- ◆ Improving the messaging training for call-centre agents when explaining the particulars of new rate plans available to customers.
- ◆ Ensuring customer communications received by the Forestry department are continuously monitored to prevent gaps during staffing changes, vacations, training, or other employee absences.

### Bundling Transmission Work

Hydro One is responsible for constructing and maintaining a province-wide network of high voltage transmission lines. Nearly 10,000 of Hydro One's transmission towers are over 80 years old and 1,400 kilometers of transmission lines are nearly 100 years old. Since a single transmission system failure can leave thousands of homes without power, considerable resources are required to replace, repair and upgrade equipment to ensure safe and stable transmission of electricity. While many transmission corridors are on provincial land, a large number also run along rights of ways on private properties.

Over the past several years the Office has handled complaints from various landowners concerned about Hydro One accessing and damaging their private property. These complaints are primarily about the company repeatedly accessing the same property and working on closely situated transmission structures year after year.

The Office identified several issues with the way certain work was being scheduled, including inefficient use of company resources, inconvenience to landowners from multiple visits, damage to land and

crops, and the scheduling of additional outages so that work could be carried out. When our review was completed, the Office recommended "bundling" work to limit repeated visits to landowners' properties which, in turn, would address many of the issues identified.

As a result of these recommendations, Hydro One has revised the way it plans and executes this work to meet two goals: 1) Reduce the negative impact to customers and landowners by eliminating multiple trips to sites; and 2) Drive efficiency and optimize resources while reducing environmental impact.

The company re-assessed its work plan for 2024 and identified many opportunities to bundle work more efficiently. This customer centered approach will help guide Hydro One's planning of transmission work and lead to numerous benefits, including reducing the number of times crews access private land, easing the impact on landowners and their properties, reducing Hydro One's environmental footprint and creating business efficiencies.





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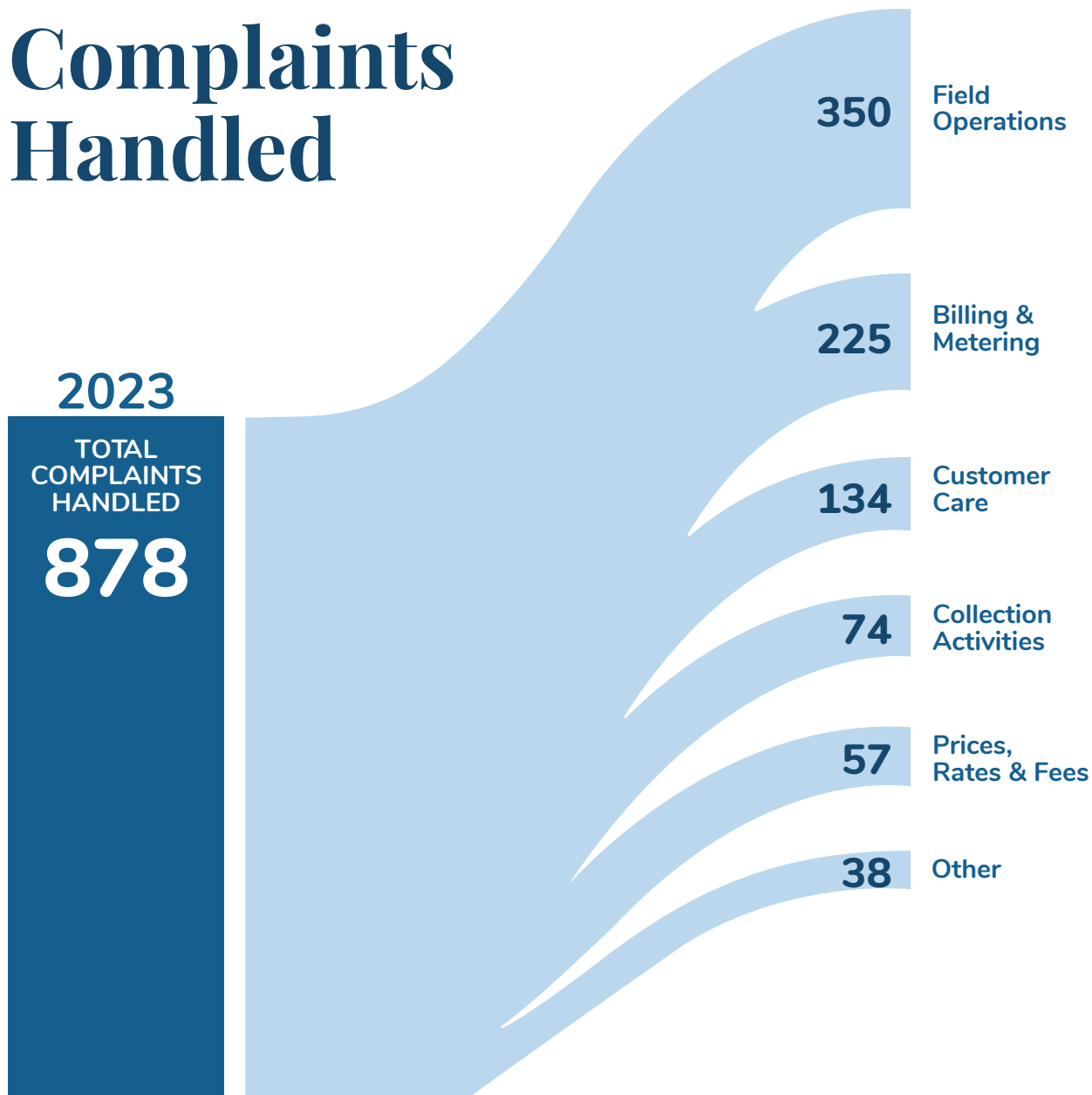
[The Ombudsman Office] was most attentive and empathetic to my issues without bias. Excellent professionalism.

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— HYDRO ONE CUSTOMER



# Complaints Handled



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**The 878 complaints handled by the Office in 2023 was 18 per cent higher than last year.**

The greatest increase in complaints was seen in Field Operations, which remained our highest complaint category. Details about complaints in each of these categories follow on the next pages of this report.

As with past years, complaint numbers were lower in the first half of 2023, before increasing after the delivery of the Office's bill insert to all Hydro One customers starting in September. In the third quarter we received our highest number of complaints in more than six years. These increased contacts continue to demonstrate the value our bill inserts play in raising awareness of the Office.

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## Complaints by Topic

# Field Operations

The increase in total complaints to the Office in 2023 was primarily driven by a 41 per cent increase in Field Operations complaints, which remained our largest complaint category overall. As with past years, complaints about Power Quality and Outages remained the largest sub-category, reinforcing the importance of Hydro One's services to our daily lives. When the power goes out, people want to know that Hydro One is taking all steps necessary to get it back on safely and quickly. Just as important, customers want Hydro One to provide them with accurate information on when service will be restored so that they are able to plan accordingly.

Our second highest source of Field Operations complaints this year was from people trying to connect to Hydro One's distribution system. This most often happens when a new home is built, a renovation has taken place, or a customer is looking to upgrade their service. Many of these complaints dealt with the length of time it takes Hydro One to complete the connection from the initial request to the final hookup. As these complaints increased, we brought this issue to the company's attention for its response. While Hydro One acknowledged it has been experiencing high demand for these types of connection requests, by reallocating staffing and resources across the province, the company has begun to reduce these delays. In addition, with the recent implementation of a new design tool to improve the consistency and efficiency of connection designs, it is expected that the company's capacity to complete this type of work will increase and that the Office should see a reduction in these complaints going forward.



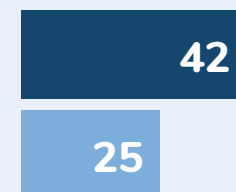
## NUMBER OF FIELD OPERATIONS COMPLAINTS

● 2023 ● 2022

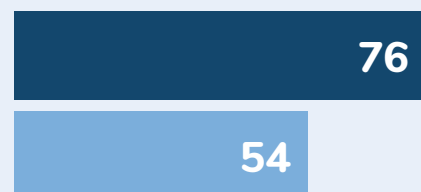
### POWER QUALITY/OUTAGES



### FORESTRY



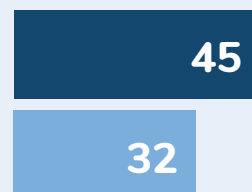
### CONNECTION



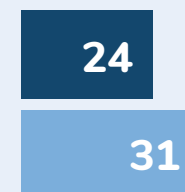
### HEALTH, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENT



### FIELD WORK



### REAL ESTATE





# Incorrect Information Provided to Customer



Ms. M was in the midst of planning the opening of her new fast-food restaurant when she contacted Hydro One in late July 2022 to request a new electrical connection. After providing Ms. M with a design and contract, Hydro One tentatively scheduled the new connection for October 2022.

Hydro One used a contractor to assist with portions of the connection project. Prior to beginning the work for the new connection, Hydro One's contractor had to request locates through Ontario One Call to identify any underground infrastructure. The contractor made the request for locates at the end of October 2022 and received the locates in early November 2022. The contractor believed the locates showed no conflicts and that Hydro One could proceed with the work. Ms. M relied on this information and proceeded to hire the necessary employees and purchase the required supplies to allow her to open the restaurant at the beginning of 2023.

The information provided by the contractor to Hydro One was incorrect. Approval from the local gas company was required before work could

proceed. When the approval was requested, the gas company did not provide a timely response. As a result, the connection request was still outstanding at the end of December 2022.

Ms. M contacted the Office as she feared she would not be able to open her restaurant on time because of the delay in completing the connection request. We investigated the matter and worked with the company to ensure the connection was completed in early January 2023. We recommended Hydro One apply a service credit to Ms. M's account for failing to provide her with accurate information, which fell below the standard of service Hydro One customers should expect. Finally, we recommended Hydro One ensure its contractors provide timely and accurate updates to Hydro One, which will help ensure correct updates are in turn provided to customers. Hydro One accepted both of our recommendations.



A photograph of a forest path. Sunlight filters through the tall, thin trees, creating a warm, golden glow on the path and the surrounding foliage. The path is covered in fallen leaves and leads into the distance. The trees are mostly evergreens, and the overall atmosphere is peaceful and serene.

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I am very satisfied with dealing with the Ombudsman's Office. [They were] very helpful in providing me with the proper contact at Hydro One. My problem has been resolved 100% to my satisfaction. Thank you.”

— HYDRO ONE CUSTOMER

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### Storm Response

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Strong storms, icy weather and high winds can affect Hydro One's ability to deliver electricity to its customers. When the power goes out, Hydro One works closely with emergency response personnel to prioritize response efforts, while ensuring the safety of its crews and the public. As storms with the potential to impact the electricity system continue to increase in frequency and intensity, Hydro One's ability to respond quickly and effectively has never been more important than it is today.

By constantly monitoring the weather, Hydro One can identify when and where storms are expected to occur and uses its outage prediction tool to anticipate impacts on its customers. When a major storm approaches, Hydro One issues press releases, and updates its website and social media channels to alert its customers, the public and the media.

Not all storms are created equal. Hydro One classifies storm responses based on the number of customers expected to lose power. To prepare its response in the areas expected to be most affected by a storm, Hydro One establishes decentralized storm command posts led by local crews.

Hydro One's initial focus is to address situations where there are safety hazards. Then the focus is on customer connections, with crews patrolling the lines to find and assess damage and reporting back to the storm command posts. This information helps coordinate the company's efforts, with a focus on restoring the greatest number of customers in the shortest period of time. The restoration sequence will typically be determined by the type and extent of the damage, how many customers are out, and whether any critical infrastructure is affected, like hospitals or water treatment facilities. In some instances, repairs need to follow





a sequence, as restoration of damage at the end of a line will require repairs earlier on the line to have already occurred.

When the power goes out, Hydro One uses various channels, like its mobile app, website, autodialer or text messages, to try and keep customers and the public up-to-date on when power will be restored. Despite the fact that Hydro One tries to provide accurate estimated times of restoration (ETRs), the Office routinely receives complaints from customers when ETRs are inaccurate, not updated regularly, or change frequently. Time and time again, we hear from customers that accurate information is vital so that people can plan on how to stay safe until power is restored – however long that takes. Hydro One is aware of this problem and knows it needs to do better. We continue to support Hydro One in its efforts.

During the winter months, the best and safest option for customers during a power outage may be to shelter in place. It is recommended everyone have provisions to last 72 hours without power. Items to have in a 72-hour emergency kit include enough food that will not spoil for all family members (including pets), a manual can opener, wind-up or battery-powered flashlight and radio, extra batteries, cash, first aid kit, medications, blankets, emergency phone numbers, and a fully charged cellphone and backup battery pack or corded phone.

Once the storm has passed and customers are reconnected, the company assesses its response and outcomes to learn for future events. While no storm response will be perfect, by continuously looking for ways to improve, Hydro One is doing its part to minimize the effect of these storms on the day-to-day lives of its customers.

## Complaints by Topic

# Billing and Metering

Billing and Metering complaints remained our second highest category of complaints this year, comprising one quarter of all complaints received in 2023. Despite the relatively large number of contacts with the Office, many related to common customer service questions and requests. This included situations where people were looking for assistance in making changes to their account details, inquiring on bill and payment statuses, or looking for explanations regarding their billing. Wherever possible, we try to provide answers to these questions directly, and connect them with the appropriate staff within the Customer Contact Centre only when requests require action from the company itself.

While the general types of Billing and Metering complaints remained consistent with last year, there was an increase in the Meter Reading sub-category. In most cases, people reached out to the Office seeking clarification after receiving bills based on estimated usage followed by a “true up” bill based on actual usage after a meter read occurred. In these cases, we discuss the circumstances with the complainant, help them understand what occurred and why, and review their bills to ensure accuracy. While Hydro One can obtain real-time Time of Use data from most customers across the province, there are still times where meter data needs to be collected directly by staff, largely due to our province’s vast geography. In those cases, estimated bills are required to be delivered monthly until a meter read and reconciliation can occur. While this can be confusing for some customers, we have not identified any issues of concern with the process currently in use. If we do identify any errors, they are brought to the company’s attention and resolved immediately. Our experience is that the company’s measurement of customer usage and billing for that usage is very accurate.

## NUMBER OF BILLING AND METERING COMPLAINTS

● 2023 ● 2022

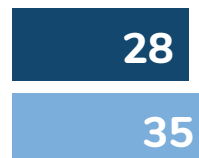
### ACCOUNT



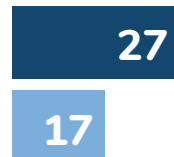
### BILLING



### METER ACCURACY



### METER READING





## CASE STUDY

# Testing Meter Accuracy

Mr. G noticed in the fall of 2023 that his monthly electricity bills had been increasing. Although Mr. G's property includes both an indoor heated pool and an electrically powered steam room, he did not think his meter was accurately recording his electricity usage. He contacted Hydro One and asked for his meter to be tested.

Hydro One's testing showed Mr. G's meter was accurate, but the meter base was found to have a crack that needed repair. Hydro One confirmed the cracked meter base had no impact on the meter's readings. Since the meter was recording and reporting usage accurately, Hydro One refused to reduce Mr. G's bills to reflect his perceived consumption. Mr. G contacted the Office as he felt Hydro One was treating him unfairly.

We investigated Mr. G's concerns but found no evidence his meter was recording inaccurate electricity usage. Our investigation also confirmed

Hydro One took reasonable steps to investigate and respond to Mr. G's initial complaint. As a result, no recommendations were made for any further steps to be taken by Hydro One regarding Mr. G's complaint.

That said, we were able to provide information to Mr. G on ways for him to better monitor and reduce his usage. This included suggesting Mr. G make use of the hourly usage data available on Hydro One's Time of Use Portal and providing him with a historical overview of his usage for the past several years. We also provided Mr. G with tips on how to reduce his energy use and obtain a home energy audit to determine if there were more ways he may be able to save energy going forward.

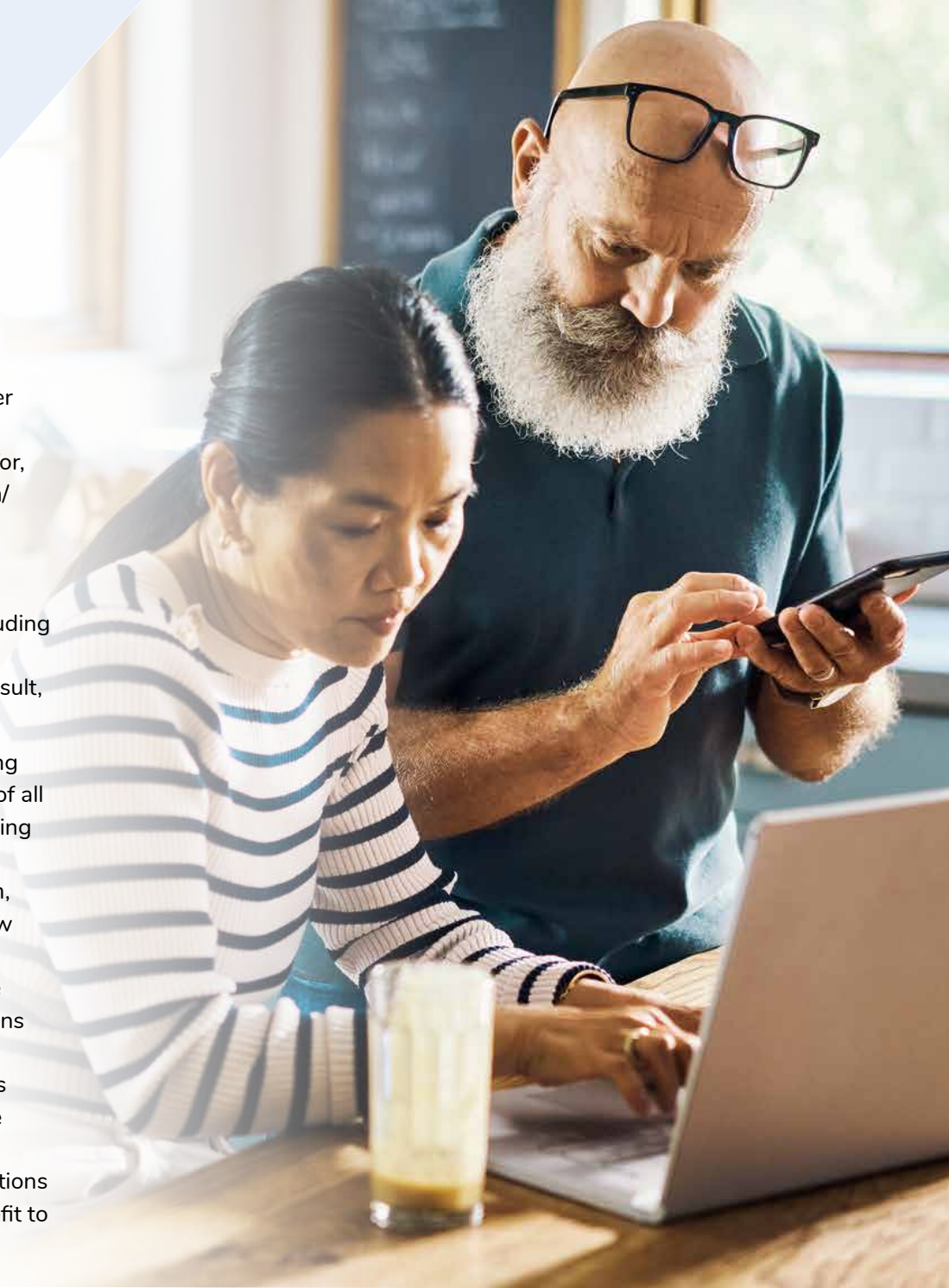


## Complaints by Topic

# Customer Care

While complaints about Customer Care issues increased by a modest 7 per cent, there was a significant decrease in complaints about Customer Service. This reduction was driven by a sharp reduction in complaints about the company's Field Business Centres (FBC) who are responsible for, among other things, the scheduling of customer requested disconnection/reconnections, new connections, and service upgrades. In past years, the Office had seen increasing complaints about customers' challenges in communicating with FBC staff. After we highlighted these issues to Hydro One, the company took various steps to address the situation including the implementation of a new phone system, improved training and role clarification, and various other improvements and enhancements. As a result, complaints in this area have decreased this year by almost 75 per cent.

While Customer Service complaints decreased, there was a corresponding increase in Damage Claims complaints which accounted for 45 per cent of all Customer Care complaints. Of these, some were from people simply looking to engage the claims process itself, but more than half were complaints from those who had their claims denied. When Hydro One denies a claim, the company informs the claimant of their ability to have the Office review the decision. Where we review the decision and our investigation finds the evidence does not reasonably support the denial, we recommend the company reconsider. This past year, over half of all individual investigations we completed were reviews of denied claims. Of these, 40 per cent resulted in recommendations to the company that the denials be reconsidered. All these recommendations were accepted. While these investigations typically result in a recommendation that only impacts one individual, a number of this year's investigations also led to recommendations to improve some of Hydro One's general processes which will be of benefit to all customers in the future.



## NUMBER OF CUSTOMER CARE COMPLAINTS

● 2023 ● 2022

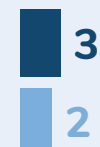
### DAMAGE CLAIMS



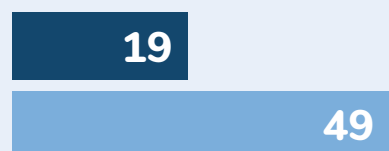
### EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOUR



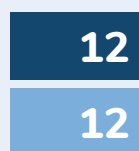
### REVENUE PROTECTION



### CUSTOMER SERVICE



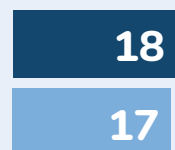
### SUPPORT PROGRAMS



### CONFIDENTIALITY/CONDITIONS



### COMMUNICATIONS



### CONSERVATION



### STATIONS AND LINES





# Power Surge Caused by Beaver

Mr. A experienced a power surge at his property which was caused by a beaver felling a tree on a nearby hydro line. The power surge damaged several of Mr. A's home appliances, resulting in a claim to Hydro One for reimbursement. Hydro One denied Mr. A's claim on the basis the power surge had been caused by an animal, which was outside of Hydro One's control. Mr. A felt the decision was unfair and requested an investigation by the Office.

Under the *Distribution System Code* ("DSC"), Hydro One is required to clear vegetation from feeders every three years or six years, depending on population density. As part of our investigation, we spoke to the Hydro One forestry worker who removed the fallen tree from the electricity line. He confirmed the tree was a 60-foot poplar tree that was 30-feet away from the line. While standing, the tree's branches would not have been close enough to encroach on the line. Our investigation further confirmed the line damaged by the tree had been cleared within the timelines required by the DSC.

Mr. A's position was that since the tree was tall enough to potentially contact the electricity line if it fell, Hydro One should have removed it during the clearance process. However, this is not how Hydro One determines whether a tree should be removed, and such an approach would lead to large scale removals across the province. Instead, Hydro One uses a detailed 'hazardous tree' assessment tool when determining whether to trim or remove a given tree. In this case, before the beaver felled it, the tree was in good health, it was growing 30-feet back from the line, and the prevailing wind blew away from the direction of the electricity line. Hydro One officials confirmed there would have been no basis for removal under the hazardous tree assessment tool.

We concluded that the cause of the tree coming into contact with the power line was not reasonably foreseeable, and on that basis no recommendation was made for Hydro One to reconsider Mr. A's damage claim.





“

Thank you for your great partnership, collaboration and fairness. It is a pleasure working together and continuing to heighten levels for our customers, for Hydro One and for our team members.”

— HYDRO ONE EMPLOYEE

## Complaints by Topic

# Collection Activities

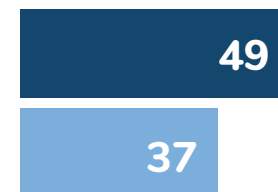
While complaints about Collection Activities increased for the second straight year, the overall number of complaints remains in line with most years before the COVID-19 pandemic. When we receive Collections or Disconnections complaints, our first step is to make sure that Hydro One has followed all the steps required by the Ontario Energy Board, the provincial regulator who sets the rules for all electricity distributors. Even where all the rules have been followed, we still try to assist these customers.

Unfortunately, many customers suffered financial hardship because of the pandemic and struggled to keep their accounts up to date. As Hydro One resumed its regular collections process, customers faced possible disconnection unless they tried to work out payment arrangements with the company. We aim to help these customers better understand their financial situations, assess their options and available community supports, and discuss possible solutions and payment arrangements that can be tailored to their unique situation. The Office can then present the customer's position to Hydro One with an aim to facilitating a resolution. Our experience has been that Hydro One is eager to work with customers to reach a workable solution for all involved. With the availability of reasonable repayment terms, enrolling in budget-billing to balance payments between high and low usage periods, and engaging community supports where available, customers who demonstrate a good faith effort to come to a solution are most often able to reach an agreement with the company to avoid disconnection.

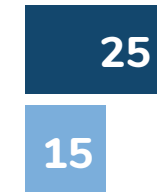
## NUMBER OF COLLECTION ACTIVITIES COMPLAINTS

● 2023 ● 2022

### DISCONNECTION



### COLLECTION



“

**The Ombudsman's Office was able to resolve the issue in a timely matter and was very useful to the resolution process.**

— HYDRO ONE CUSTOMER



# Winter Disconnection of General Service Account

The Ontario Energy Board (“OEB”) sets rules for the electricity sector, including disconnections. One of these rules is a Winter Moratorium where electricity companies cannot disconnect occupied residential properties for non-payment between November 15 to April 30.

Ms. R, the owner of a property with six residential units (the “Property”), contacted the Office after being disconnected on December 7, 2022 due to significant arrears dating back years. Ms. R occupied one of the residential units and the other five units were occupied by tenants.

Our investigation determined Hydro One was not unreasonable in its decision to hold Ms. R responsible for the outstanding arrears. Ms. R was the owner of the Property during the entire period in question and collected all-inclusive rent from the tenants. Despite this, we had concerns about whether the Property should have been disconnected for non-payment during the Winter Moratorium.

Section 4.8.5 of the *Distribution System Code* specifies that the Winter Moratorium only applies to customers in the Residential Rate classification. However, Hydro One’s *Conditions of Service* outlines if a property contains more than four units, which are all billed off one meter (as was the case here), the related account is classified as General Service. Therefore, Hydro One was not prohibited from disconnecting the Property during the Winter Moratorium.

Although there were no OEB rules preventing Hydro One from disconnecting the Property, and the company’s actions were reasonable given the amount of money it was owed from the landlord/owner, the Office recommended the company reconnect the Property until the end of the Winter Moratorium. This recommendation was made because innocent tenants would be left without heat during the winter through no fault of their own. Hydro One accepted this recommendation.







“

I am very grateful to the Ombudsman's Office. I was amazed at how quickly Hydro One responded after I had contacted the Ombudsman's Office. Now the issue is resolved. Thanks so much.

— HYDRO ONE CUSTOMER

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## Complaints by Topic

# Prices, Rates and Fees

Complaints about Prices, Rates and Fees was our lowest complaint category in 2023. With so many areas of our lives being adversely affected by the pressures of inflation, having regulated electricity prices and delivery rates set years in advance provides a level of consistency and stability to electricity bills that many other areas of the economy cannot emulate.

While the relative stability of overall electricity costs may be better appreciated these days, the Office still regularly receives complaints from customers about the delivery rate portion of their bill - specifically, the reason for delivery charges and the associated costs. Most often complaints are from seasonal homeowners who struggle to understand why Hydro One charges significant amounts for delivery even in months when little or no electricity is being used.

While the cost of electricity in the bill is directly related to the power consumed, those costs are simply collected on behalf of the generators of that electricity and not retained by Hydro One. On the other hand, all costs associated with Hydro One's distribution business is paid from the delivery rate portion of a bill. For example, these costs pay for the staff, equipment and materials needed to build, inspect, and repair the lines. They also pay for the facilities and staff who answer customer calls when problems occur, or those staff responsible for the technical designing and planning for improvements to the grid to reduce outages in the future. When a customer complains about the cost of delivery fees on their bill, we take the time to walk through the process of how these fees are set and approved at the Ontario Energy Board, what these fees cover, and why they remain relatively consistent even in months of low electricity use. While not every customer is happy with this information, educating complainants is one of the key roles an Ombudsman office can play.





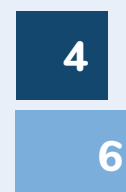
## NUMBER OF PRICES, RATES AND FEES COMPLAINTS

● 2023 ● 2022

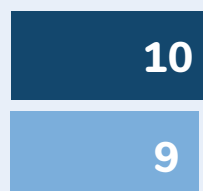
### DELIVERY



### ELECTRICITY PRICES



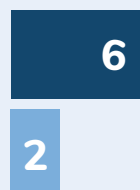
### RATE CLASS



### RETAILERS



### MANDATORY CHARGES, MISC. FEES



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The Ombudsman Office  
treated me with courtesy  
and respect - 110%

— HYDRO ONE CUSTOMER

# Year-Round Residence

Mr. M's mother inherited a lake-side family cottage in 1991 and opened a Hydro One account in her name. Since the 1960s, the property had only been used by the family as a traditional seasonal property. Mr. M's mother continued to use the property as a seasonal cottage until making the property her full-time year-round residence in 1998.

Mr. M contacted the Office in July 2023 with a complaint about the rate classification of the property. Mr. M had asked Hydro One to classify the property as a full-time residence retroactive to 1998. He claimed Hydro One should have noticed an increase in the amount of electricity being used at the property and known someone was living there full-time. Hydro One refused this request as Mr. M's mother did not complete the necessary declaration form confirming the change of use of the property. Mr. M disputed this and claimed he submitted the declaration form three years earlier. Despite Hydro One having no record of receiving the declaration, the company nonetheless agreed to reclassify and rebill the property for that three-year period. Mr. M felt that was unreasonable and contacted the Office asking for a review.

Although the seasonal rate class has been eliminated, this classification still has an impact on the availability of specific government rebates. The Ontario Energy Board requires certain conditions to be met when reclassifying a property from seasonal to year-round residential, including not having another property designated as a year-round residence, living at the property at least four days of the week for eight months of the year, and using that address for official government purposes like driver's licenses and voting. The amount of electricity used at a property is not a factor in this reclassification. Even if consumption was to be considered, Hydro One has over 1.3 million customers and we determined it would not be reasonable to expect the company to monitor usage for the purpose of trying to determine if a customer had changed the way they were using their property. The company had already accepted Mr. M's assertion he had submitted the form three years earlier and offered a reimbursement for that period. As a result, the company's position was not found to be unreasonable, and no recommendations were made by the Office.





“

We appreciate the professionalism and thoroughness the Ombudsman team demonstrates in each and every instance.”

— HYDRO ONE EMPLOYEE





“

You have great people working for you  
[who] truly went the extra mile.

— HYDRO ONE CUSTOMER

## How Can We Help?



1-844-608-8756 or 416-345-1505



[HydroOneOmbudsman.com](https://HydroOneOmbudsman.com)



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**Ensuring equity.  
Delivering fairness.**



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