



**LE PROTECTEUR DU CITOYEN**  
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**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **THE QUÉBEC OMBUDSMAN LISTENING TO CITIZENS FROM THE REGIONS**

**Québec City, June 7, 2007** – Over 50% of the complaints regarding departments and agencies received by the Québec Ombudsman originate from citizens living in regions other than Montréal or Québec City. While this percentage is 60% for complaints and reports regarding regional health and social services network establishments, we must bear in mind that Montréal and Québec City establishments also treat citizens from outlying areas.

The Québec Ombudsman's interventions with regional populations are concrete, notably given the collective scope of its recommendations. This is attested to by numerous situations described in the Québec Ombudsman's 2006-2007 annual report. "When we investigate complaints, the impact of our recommendations is often a collective one that benefits a great number of people, either retroactively or by helping to avoid future instances of prejudice," explained Ombudsperson Raymonde Saint-Germain.

### **Erosion of the banks of the St. Lawrence: numerous citizens affected**

The Ombudsperson considered the issue of the erosion of the banks of the St. Lawrence, a phenomenon that poses a threat to property and infrastructures in the Côte-Nord and other regions. This erosion has a direct impact on the safety of numerous citizens in 4 regional country municipalities, 31 municipalities and 7 Aboriginal communities. The erosion of banks, moreover, incorporates an economic risk that is not limited to the Côte-Nord region. In the more or less short term, the government and its partners will seemingly need to take action in other regions of Québec. Two elements were deemed critical and worthy of official action by the Ombudsperson: the government's natural hazard response plan, and the quality and timely availability of the information provided to the citizens concerned.

### **Success for farmers and maple syrup producers**

As a result of the Québec Ombudsman's intervention, four veal producers received additional financial support through the Prime-Vert program, administered by the Ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation. This assistance was granted to help them make changes to their structures for storing manure, originally erected based on departmental data, so that they

would be compliant. At the outset, the department refused to accept responsibility for the non-compliance of the structures, which had notably been constructed based on recognized standards.

In the same vein, the Québec Ombudsman pursued the issue of compensation for a maple syrup producer who had suffered losses following a wind storm in 1999, a situation it had first brought to the department's attention in 2003. Having been initially successful with part its intervention, the Québec Ombudsman then focused on obtaining equivalent compensation for other maple syrup producers having suffered similar losses. As a result of the Québec Ombudsman's involvement, a total of 10 other producers were compensated.

### **A new business finally able to see the light of day**

Faced with delays in its exchanges with the Ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune, a citizen contacted the Québec Ombudsman regarding his attempts to start up a sawmill on public land in the Côte-Nord region. The initial investigation illustrated that the delays in this case were shared by the parties. Given the situation's negative impact on project-related investments and jobs, and the risk that the planned business would never be created, the Québec Ombudsman took action.

The Québec Ombudsman recommended that the Ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune better coordinate its internal directorates and activities, to notably standardize its ways of working and better serve citizens. The Québec Ombudsman's intervention resulted in the citizen obtaining the necessary licences to start up his sawmill in a region with a high unemployment rate.

### **Equity for regional populations in the area of health and social services**

The Québec Ombudsman pays particular attention to any circumstances likely to prejudice citizens. One of its primary concerns over the past year was the right of users to avail themselves of regional health services.

The Ombudsperson took up the defence of equitable treatment when she became involved in the debate concerning the adoption of new measures for access to specialized medical services, reminding the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux of the importance of ensuring that all users have access to post-surgery rehabilitation services, in their region of origin, and via the public network or a private clinic.

The Québec Ombudsman's annual report cites the example of a woman who, after having undergone knee surgery in a Québec City establishment, had to wait three weeks to be seen by a physical therapist in her region, despite her physician's recommendation that she be treated three times a week. A follow-up visit to her physician resulted in her having to be operated on a second time. In addressing this complaint, the Québec Ombudsman urged the establishment to make major improvements to the availability and continuity of its physical therapy services.

The Ombudsperson continues to focus on ensuring that users requiring physical therapy, psychiatric services or in-home services are not divided into two categories: those who live in the major centres and those hailing from the regions.

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