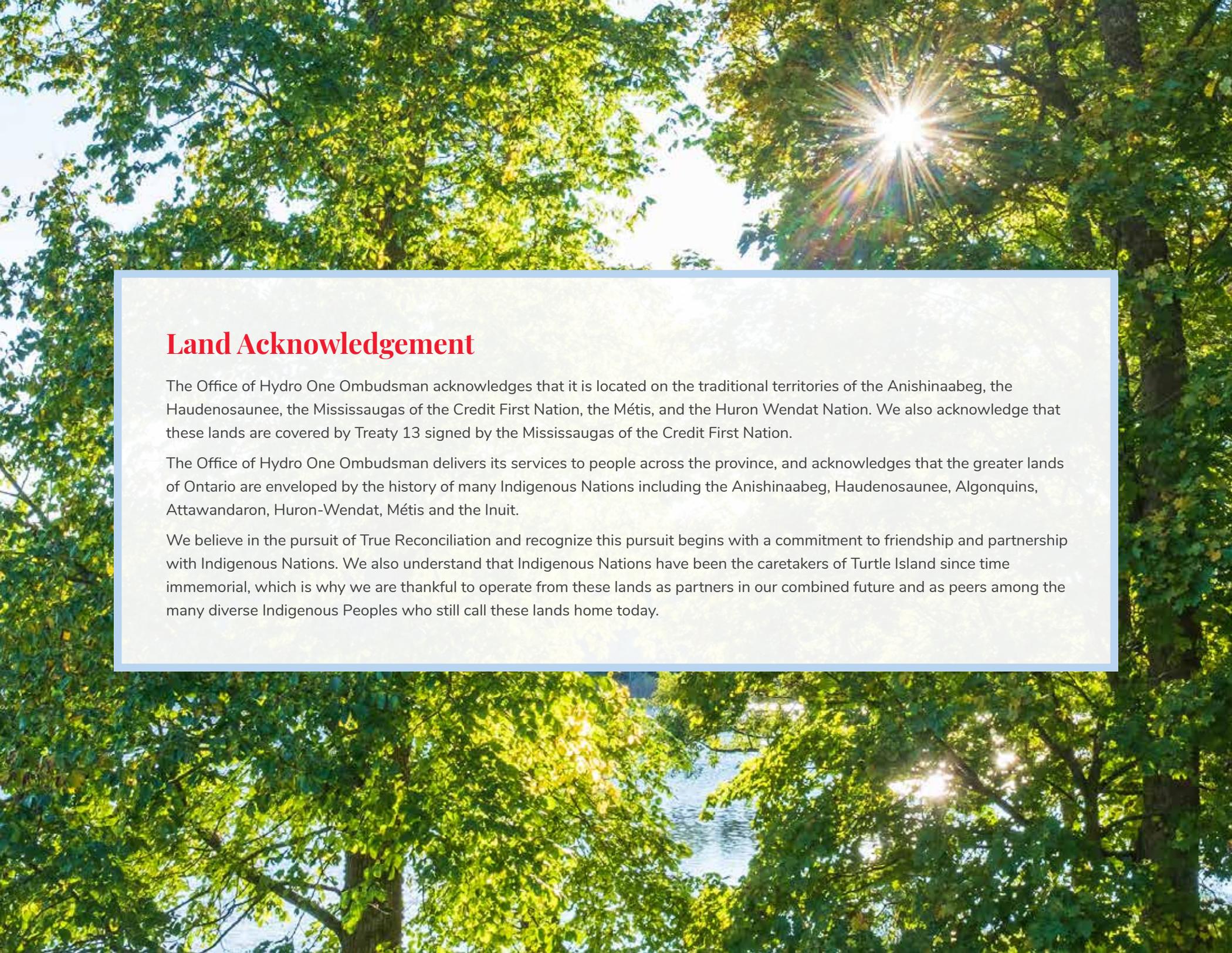


2022

OFFICE OF THE
HYDRO ONE OMBUDSMAN

ANNUAL
REPORT





Land Acknowledgement

The Office of 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. We also acknowledge that these lands are covered by Treaty 13 signed by the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

The Office of 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.

We believe in the pursuit of True Reconciliation and recognize 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

This report presents the Office of the Hydro One Ombudsman's results for the fiscal period of January 1, 2022 – December 31, 2022, 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.

Any member of my team can tell you that I always stress I do not want our Office to become a clearing house for complaints, where we merely redirect customers to another person or department. To the extent that we are able, we want to help. Period. This is the message that we deliver to all of Hydro One's 1.4 million customers every year through our bill insert that advertises the free and confidential services that we provide. The bill insert continues to be an effective way of letting new and existing customers alike know that we are here for them whenever they need us.

It seems that our message is being heard. In 2022, my team and I handled 745 complaints from across the province, a 12.5% increase over 2021. Despite the increase in complaints, we were able to maintain high service levels with 100% of complaints acknowledged within two business days and 99.7% of all complaints closed within thirty business days. While the vast majority of people looking for assistance from our Office continues to be individual customers, this past year saw an increase in the number of companies and small business asking for our help. We provided support to all equally.

Over the years, I have found that “help” can take many forms. Sometimes it is assisting a customer to negotiate a repayment plan with the company if their account is overdue. Other times it involves investigating whether anything can be done to reduce the number of power interruptions a customer experiences. Regardless of the issue, our Office always looks for the most effective way to help those who contact us. This past year,

we resolved an increasing number of complaints via our “early resolution” stream. Through this informal process, we are often able to resolve complaints within days of being contacted. This allows a complainant to get closure to an issue they may have been dealing with for an extended time and allows the company to redirect its efforts back to its main business of powering the lives of Ontarians.

As our Office matures, we continue to look for ways to “help” the company avoid complaints altogether by ensuring it is providing services in a fair and reasonable manner. This is often done by identifying systemic issues in existing processes and procedures and making recommendations that will result in future improvements enjoyed over the long term. As Hydro One sees these benefits first-hand, we are increasingly being consulted by the company at earlier stages of its policy and program development. This allows us to proactively provide feedback on best practices in fair service delivery and share emerging trends identified through our complaint handling. Our gradual return to in-person work allowed us to conduct more of these collaborative sessions which are even more impactful when done face-to-face with our business stakeholders.

I thank the members of the public who took the time to reach out to us, trusting us with their stories and to help them when it was most needed. My team and I will always be at the other end of the phone, email, letter, or fax ready to help. I also want to thank Hydro One for their continued collaboration and I look forward to what we will accomplish in 2023.

About the Office

The Office of the Hydro One Ombudsman helps ensure Hydro One delivers just, fair and equitable services to its customers and the public, acting as an office of last resort for complaints from anyone affected by Hydro One.

We are independent from the company's management and operations, reporting directly to Hydro One's Board of Directors through its Governance and Regulatory Committee.

The Office is led by the Ombudsman and supported by a team of investigators responsible for managing the complaint process from intake to resolution. All our services are free and confidential. Our work is guided by our Mandate and by our values.



Mandate

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

(Reference: Section 1, Mandate of the Ombudsman, October 2015)

Our values Independence • Impartiality • Confidentiality

How we address complaints

The Office of the Hydro One Ombudsman takes every complaint seriously. Wherever possible, we try to address complaints through our early resolution process. By providing information, engaging in informal discussions, and mediating concerns between the complainant and the company, many issues brought to the Office can be resolved quickly and effectively.

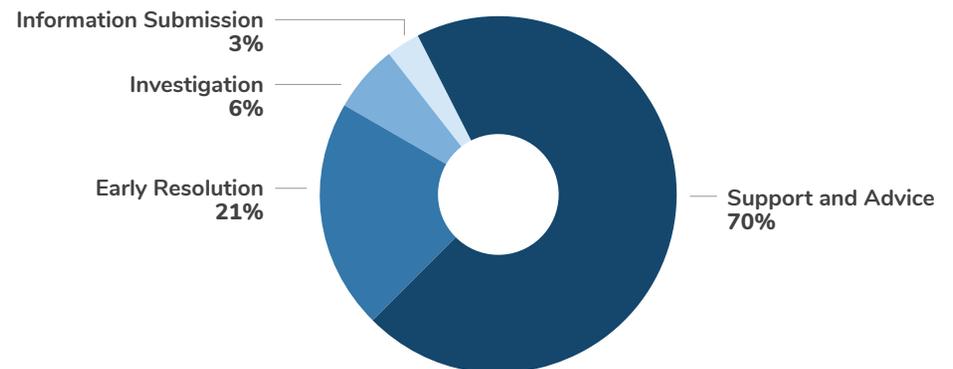
Where complaints are more complex or involve potential systemic issues, we typically conduct full investigations. At the conclusion of both our early resolution process or an investigation, the Office provides Hydro One with advice and recommendations on how to address any findings of unfairness and reports the outcome to the complainant.

If a complaint to the Office is premature or falls outside our mandate, we still do our best to give the complainant the support and advice they need to move forward with their issue and refer them to the appropriate department within Hydro One or 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 anonymously and in the aggregate to the Governance and Regulatory Committee of the Board of Directors.



CASE TYPE 2022 PERCENTAGES



The complaint process

The Office of the Hydro One Ombudsman provides customers or members of the public with a way to raise concerns if they believe they have been unfairly or unreasonably affected by Hydro One's actions or decisions. As an office of last resort, the Office generally requires complainants to first go through Hydro One's internal complaints process.

Step 1: Contacting Hydro One

The first step with any complaint is to raise the complaint directly with a Hydro One staff member to begin Hydro One's internal complaint process. If a complainant contacts the Office before they have exhausted Hydro One's process, we determine who at Hydro One can help resolve the issue and arrange for them to reach out to the complainant directly. The Office may determine it is appropriate to intervene earlier in some instances, particularly if there has been excessive delay in responding to the complaint, the person or group is vulnerable, or it is just the right thing to do.

Step 2: Understanding Hydro One's response

If a decision has been made that the complainant believes is unfair or unreasonable, the issue should be reviewed by a Hydro One supervisor or further escalated to the company's Customer Relations Centre. If there are any delays or problems escalating to a supervisor or the Customer Relations Centre, contact the Office.

Step 3: Making a complaint

If the issue remains unresolved or the resolution being proposed by Hydro One is unsatisfactory, then a complaint can be made to the Office. Complaints can be made by 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 will review the details and contact the complainant to learn more about the issue. The complaint may be resolved by providing support, advice, or referrals to other agencies. The Office may also resolve the complaint through the early resolution process by engaging in informal discussions and mediation with the complainant and the company.

Step 5: Investigating complaint

If the complaint is more complex or requires additional research, the Office will launch an impartial investigation. After reviewing all relevant information, the Office will determine if the complainant was treated fairly by the company. The Office may also decide to launch a systemic investigation, if it is determined that the underlying cause of the complaint has the potential to impact a significant number of customers or members of the public.

Step 6: Communicating the findings

After concluding the investigation, the Office will notify the complainant of the outcome. Specifically, the Office will share its findings and decision, advise if any additional steps will be taken to resolve the complaint, and outline if any recommendations were made to the company.

The story in numbers



745 COMPLAINTS
HANDLED

HOW THE PUBLIC CONTACTS US



60%
PHONE



38%
ONLINE



2%
OTHER

WHO CONTACTS THE OFFICE?



90%
RESIDENTIAL



7%
COMMERCIAL



3%
OTHER



100%

COMPLAINT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
(WITHIN 2 DAYS)



99.7%

COMPLAINT RESOLUTION
(WITHIN 30 DAYS)



100%

RECOMMENDATIONS
ACCEPTED

Complaints handled

The Office was contacted by 763 complainants in 2022, with complaints withdrawn in 18 instances.

The 745 complaints handled by the Office was 12.5% higher than in 2021.

Complaint levels were lower in the first half of 2022. However, as with past years, the delivery of the Office's bill insert to all Hydro One customers during the three-month period of September to November led to a marked rise in contacts. These increased contacts continues to demonstrate the value the insert offers in raising awareness of the Office and the free complaint resolution services available to anyone affected by Hydro One's activities.

745 2022 2021 662

FIELD OPERATIONS



BILLING & METERING



CUSTOMER CARE



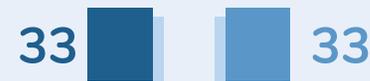
PRICES, RATES & FEES



COLLECTION ACTIVITIES



OTHER



“

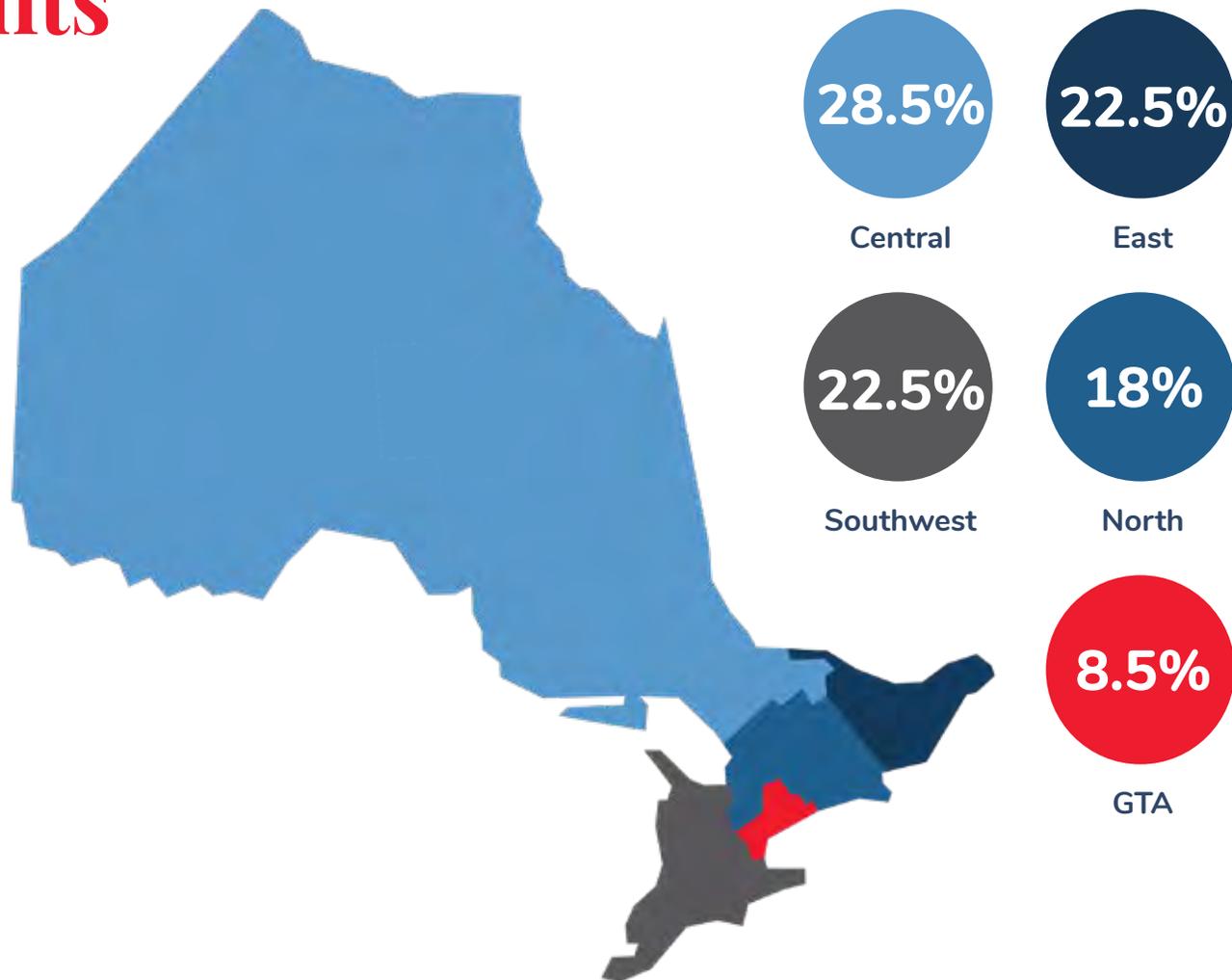
I find my interactions (and those of my team) to be highly valuable, positive, and progressing us to the next level for our customers and business.”

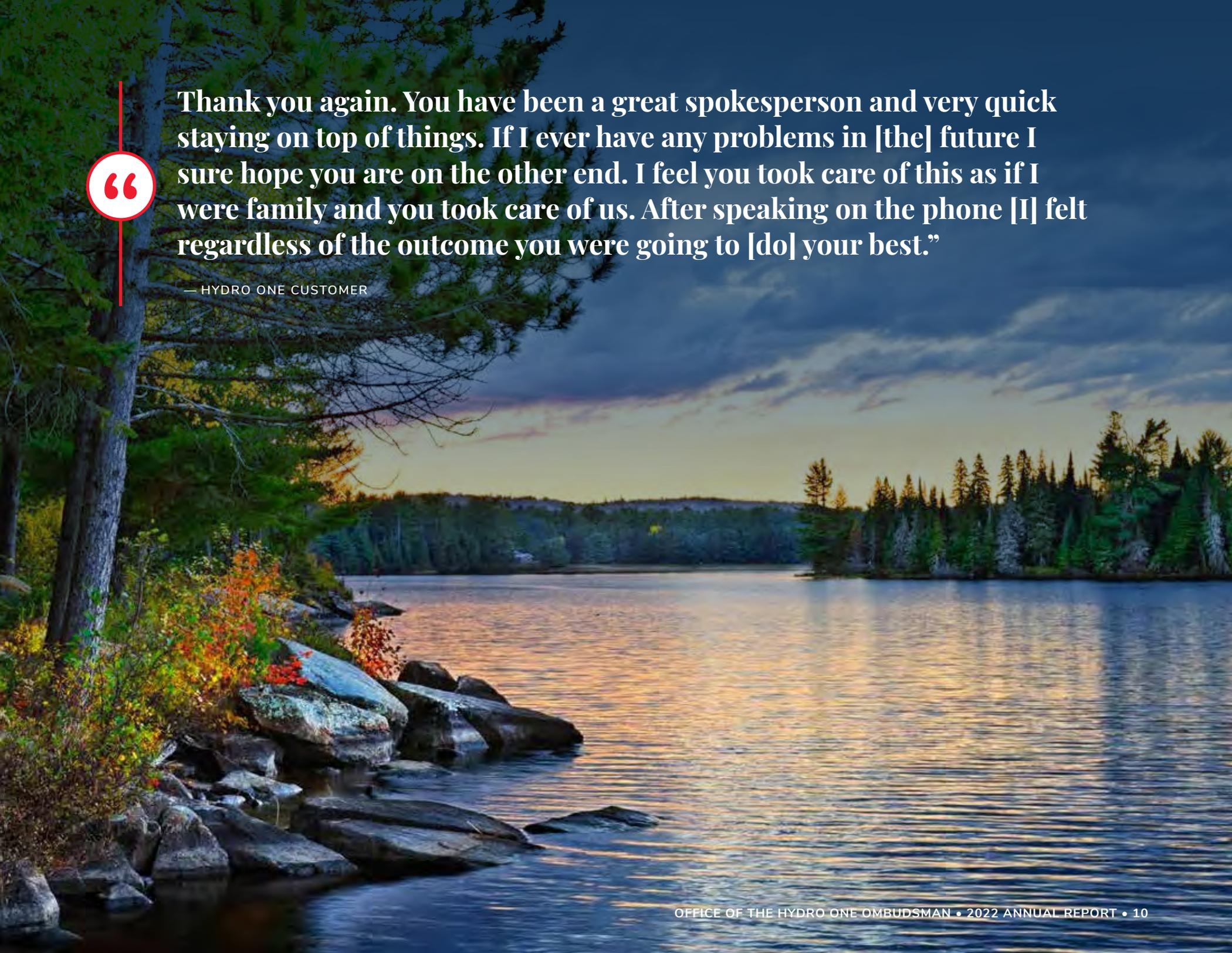
— HYDRO ONE EMPLOYEE

Breakdown of complaints by region

The Office of the Hydro One Ombudsman tracks the origin of complaints by recording the postal code of the property associated with the complaint.

Postal codes were collected for 97.3% of jurisdictional complaints handled in 2022. Despite the fact that Hydro One does not generally provide distribution services directly to many customers in the GTA, we still receive complaints from individuals in this area, primarily about the clearing of trees and maintenance within Hydro One's transmission corridors.





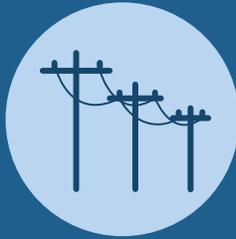
Thank you again. You have been a great spokesperson and very quick staying on top of things. If I ever have any problems in [the] future I sure hope you are on the other end. I feel you took care of this as if I were family and you took care of us. After speaking on the phone [I] felt regardless of the outcome you were going to [do] your best.”

— HYDRO ONE CUSTOMER

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 2022, we received 84 complaints that were outside of our jurisdiction, representing 11% 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.



OTHER UTILITIES

We cannot address complaints about other Distribution Companies or Utilities



EMPLOYEE BEHAVIOUR

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



ELECTRICITY PRICES

Electricity prices are set by the Ontario Energy Board



UNDERGROUND LOCATES

Where Hydro One requests locates of other utilities underground assets, these are managed by Ontario One Call, an external not-for-profit organization



SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Electricity support programs like Ontario Electricity Support Program (OESP) are created by the Ontario Energy Board



“

Really great experience with the Ombudsman’s Office. Even though the office didn’t have jurisdiction over my matter, [they] found the right person in Hydro One and she contacted me on the same day. Very helpful.”

— HYDRO ONE CUSTOMER



Recommendations at work

New connections

In 2022, we heard from customers who faced challenges when trying to connect their homes and businesses to Hydro One's grid. In some instances, customers were unable to get timely updates from Hydro One on the status of their connection request. In other instances, customers were facing scheduling delays or having appointments cancelled on short notice. When reviewing these complaints, the Office determined that a combination of outdated technology, labour shortages, supply chain constraints, and increased demand all contributed to the current backlog of customers awaiting connections.

The Office raised these issues with the company, who acknowledged that it must do better for customers and took immediate action to improve responsiveness, address the backlog of pending new connections, and reduce the wait time customers were facing. Some of the steps the company took included the onboarding of additional staff, redirecting designers to the areas of the province with the worst

backlog, and the roll-out of a new phone system in the Field Business Centres (FBC) which better tracks incoming customer inquiries, thereby allowing staff to provide more timely responses.

A combination of the above actions has resulted in almost immediate improvement. As of the end of 2022, the company reported that:

- 84% of inbound calls to FBCs were answered within 20 seconds.
- Less than 5% of customer inbound calls to FBCs were abandoned by customers before being answered by FBC staff.
- Over 40% decrease between when the customer connection request is made and the design is scheduled.

The Office will continue to monitor the company's progress in this regard, share insights gleaned from new complaints, and make recommendations for improvement wherever necessary.



Recommendations at work



Unregistered easement searching

An easement is a legal right acquired from property owners which allows Hydro One to construct, operate, access and maintain its facilities on lands it does not own. When buying a property, the existence of easements is a “must-know” as they may affect how one can use the land. For this reason, a real estate lawyer will conduct an “easement search” prior to the closing of the sale. In addition to new purchasers, existing landowners looking to alter the physical structures on their land, for example by adding a swimming pool or an addition to their home, would also need to know of the existence of any easements which might prevent them from proceeding with construction.

While Hydro One had an on-line search tool available to the public on its website, it was cumbersome to navigate and used antiquated searching parameters, often resulting in inaccurate results. This led to increased requests for easement searches to be conducted by Hydro One Real Estate Associates, leading to backlogs and delay.

In response to recommendations made by the Office, Hydro One recently unveiled its improved tool for members of the public to more easily search Hydro One’s database, helping them to identify whether Hydro One has unregistered easements impacting a specific piece of land. This improved tool can search by street address or keyword, display the results on a map to confirm location, and allows results to be exported by users in various formats.

In the first six weeks after its launch on November 14, 2022, this new tool had already been used by 173 different users, with 418 completed searches. In addition to being more accurate, user friendly, and cost effective, this tool will also create efficiencies within Hydro One by freeing up staff who would otherwise be responding to these inquiries in writing.

Complaints by topic

Field operations

Field operations continues to be the largest area of complaints received by the Office. This is not surprising considering it covers everything from connecting new properties to the grid, completing forestry work across the province, and responding to issues of power quality and outages. Of these, complaints about outages and power quality remained the highest driver of complaints for the sixth year in a row. The importance of power quality and reliability cannot be overstated, and a recent customer engagement study commissioned by Hydro One has served to reinforce that. Feedback indicated that customers need and expect power reliability, and recognize the value of investments that would, among other things, improve overall reliability. Hydro One confirmed in its recent rate filing to the Ontario Energy Board that it plans significant investments in system renewal over the coming years to address assets posing significant reliability, safety, and/or environmental risks.

On the other hand, complaints about forestry was one area within field operations that saw a significant reduction in complaints in 2022. The forestry group seeks innovative ways to approach their work, an example of which was the implementation of the Optimal Cycle Protocol (OCP) in 2018. The OCP reduced what was often a ten-year clearing cycle to a more targeted and consistent three-year cycle. By reducing time between vegetation clearing cycles, Hydro One has been able to increase the length of distribution lines cleared annually and address high risk defects more quickly thus reducing the risk of tree related outages. As a result of the OCP, trees are no longer the primary cause of outages, with a corresponding reduction in both frequency and duration.



NUMBER OF FIELD OPERATIONS COMPLAINTS

● 2022 ● 2021



[We] can not thank you enough. We have hydro at our new home build and the staff who attended were great.”

— HYDRO ONE CUSTOMER



CASE STUDY

Removal of trees in error

Mr. K owns a vacant lot with a privately owned road running alongside it. Hydro One crews were in the area performing forestry work around the powerline running along the side of the road. The tree debris was being stored in pockets along the side of the road with permission from the road's owner. Unfortunately, some of this tree debris was mistakenly stored directly on Mr. K's property.

Mr. K's vacant lot had a variety of trees and saplings on it. As part of the final stages of Hydro One's clean-up process, a heavy-duty grinder was used to grind and mulch the tree debris. When used on Mr. K's property, the heavy-duty grinder bent Mr. K's survey marker, damaged the limbs of some large hardwood trees, and mulched a large variety of saplings. Due to the efficiency of this tool, there was no remaining evidence of these saplings after the work was completed.

Mr. K complained to the company about the Hydro One crews trespassing on his land and the damage that resulted. While Mr. K was offered compensation for the survey marker and larger damaged trees, he was not offered compensation for the mulched saplings. Mr. K brought his concerns to the Ombudsman's Office for review.

Our Office investigated the matter and recommended that Mr. K's claim for damages relating to the saplings be reconsidered. Although Hydro One's actions (i.e., use of the grinder) made it impossible to determine the exact number of saplings that were in the area, evidence from Hydro One and an expert retained by Mr. K supported a finding that the amount Mr. K was seeking was reasonable. Hydro One accepted our recommendation and Mr. K was offered additional compensation.

“

The interaction between the Ombudsman and the field staff was outstanding, educational, eye opening, and a very positive interaction that gave all involved a great understanding in how we both can interact to better serve our customers as well as how we can better serve our company.”

— HYDRO ONE EMPLOYEE

Complaints by topic

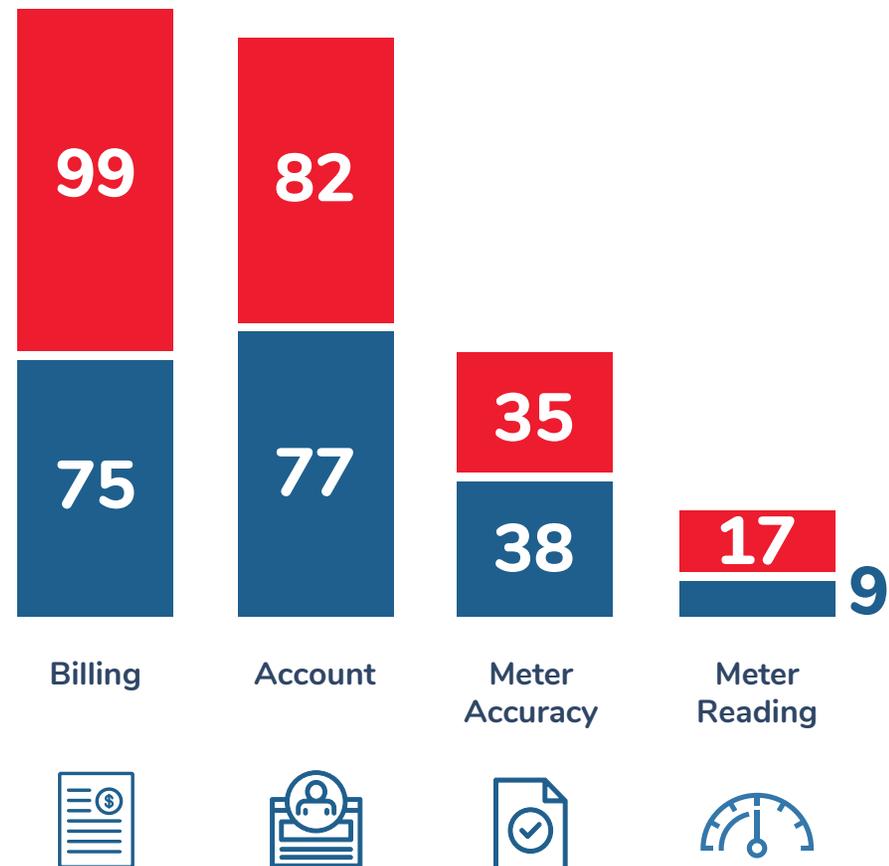
Billing and metering

As with past years, complaints about billing and metering continue to be one of our highest complaint categories. However, the types of complaints we received this year were similar to those handled in 2021. In most instances, customers were raising concerns about their Hydro One account or seeking clarification or assistance with billing related issues. Wherever possible, we provide complainants with the information necessary to address and respond to their inquiries. In cases where further action is required from the company, the Office connects complainants with Hydro One staff that can resolve the issue.

The Office continues to receive many complaints from customers about meter accuracy, especially in cases involving an unexpectedly high bill. Smart meters, which are subject to stringent inspection and testing requirements from Measurement Canada, remain exceedingly accurate at measuring electrical usage. While every complaint is investigated on its own merits, we have found that there is often an unknown source of power consumption that is responsible for the high bill rather than a malfunctioning meter.

NUMBER OF BILLING AND METERING COMPLAINTS

● 2022 ● 2021





CASE STUDY

Meter accuracy

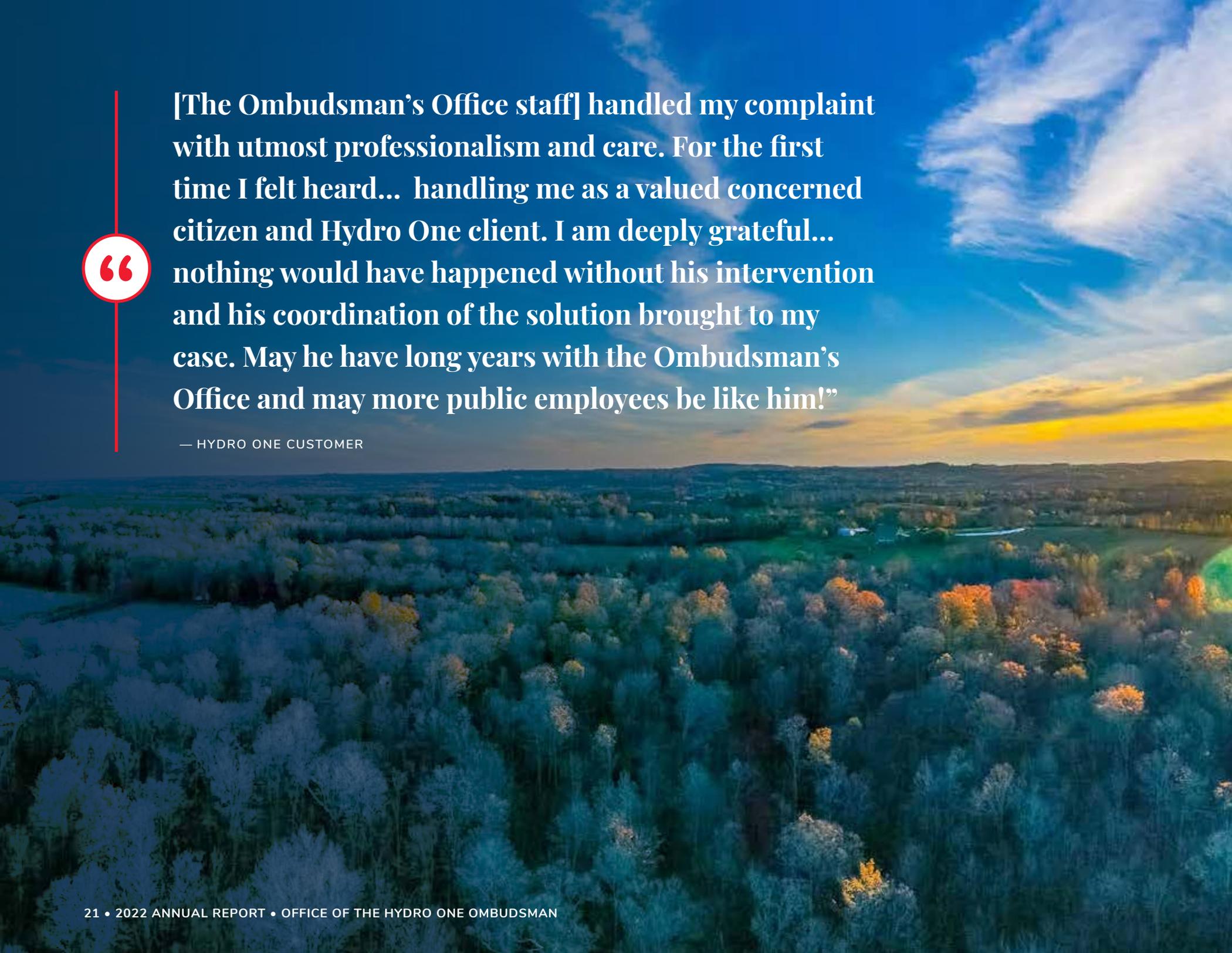
Ms. M owns a cottage and receives quarterly bills. When Ms. M received her May 2021 bill, it was significantly higher than past bills and she disputed the accuracy of her meter. Hydro One tested Ms. M's meter and found it was accurate according to standards set by Measurement Canada. Ms. M contacted the Office requesting we conduct our own review of her bills to ensure they were accurately reflecting her consumption.

As Ms. M's cottage is in a remote part of the province, Hydro One's smart meter network is unable to communicate with the meter to automatically collect readings. As a result, Hydro One sends an employee out to the property once a year to manually read the meter. Of the four bills Ms. M receives a year, three are estimated bills (based on historical consumption), and the fourth bill is based on the actual meter read. If there are variances between the estimated bills and Ms. M's actual

consumption, the fourth bill serves to "true up" consumption for the 12-month period.

Our investigation confirmed Ms. M's disputed bill was the bill based on the actual meter read. The amount billed between May 2020 and May 2021 matched the exact amount of electricity used, as recorded by her meter. We reviewed six years of Ms. M's bills and confirmed that while her consumption between May 2020 to May 2021 was higher than her typical yearly usage, Ms. M had consumed similar amounts of electricity in the past.

While there was no evidence indicating the meter was inaccurate or Ms. M was overbilled, Hydro One offered her a 10-month installment plan to pay off her bill. We did not find Hydro One to have been either unfair or unreasonable in addressing Ms. M's concerns and no recommendations were made by the Office.



[The Ombudsman’s Office staff] handled my complaint with utmost professionalism and care. For the first time I felt heard... handling me as a valued concerned citizen and Hydro One client. I am deeply grateful... nothing would have happened without his intervention and his coordination of the solution brought to my case. May he have long years with the Ombudsman’s Office and may more public employees be like him!”

— HYDRO ONE CUSTOMER



Complaints by topic

Customer care

Customer care complaints rose by 16% this past year. This increase was primarily due to two types of complaints: poor customer service and the denial of damage claims arising from outages.

The first group of complainants were primarily individuals and businesses seeking to have new properties connected to Hydro One's distribution network. Complaints included appointments cancelled without notice, Hydro One failing to respond to customer phone calls or emails, and unreasonable delay in Hydro One providing layouts and customer contracts. When supported by sufficient evidence, recommendations were made that these customers receive service credits as compensation for the poor service received. In total, 15 service credits were provided to customers based on recommendations made by the Office.

The second group of complaints were from individuals whose damages claims were denied. Of the 42 investigations completed by the Office in 2022, 15 of them were appeals of denied claims. Given that Hydro One proactively identifies the Ombudsman's Office as an appeal avenue for all denied claims, allowing an impartial review for anyone who feels the company's denial to be unfair or unreasonable, the high number of investigations in this area is not concerning. These investigations provide the Office with regular opportunities to review the claims process, and where gaps or issues are identified, make recommendations to the company for improvement.



The practical support, outcome, stress relief and avoiding an inappropriate financial burden was/is invaluable! Thank you.”

— HYDRO ONE CUSTOMER

NUMBER OF CUSTOMER CARE COMPLAINTS

● 2022 ● 2021





CASE STUDY

Denied damage claim

Mr. G's hot tub was damaged following a power outage in June 2022. He made a claim to Hydro One's Claims Department for the cost of repairs. Mr. G's claim was denied on the grounds that the cause of the outage was an unexpected failure of Hydro One equipment, which was outside of the control of the company.

Mr. G contacted the Office after receiving Hydro One's denial letter. It was his position that since the outage was caused by a failure of Hydro One's equipment, the company should be responsible for paying for the damages to his hot tub. The Office reviewed Hydro One's records and spoke with the front-line staff who responded to the outage. Our investigation determined the outage occurred because of a failure of a Hydro One live line clamp, which connects Hydro One's primary distribution lines to a switch. While the exact reason for the failure was unknown, possible causes included weather, salt, or vibration.

Hydro One's *Conditions of Service* forms the contract between the

company and its customers. The *Conditions of Service* detail that while Hydro One is obligated to make reasonable efforts to provide customers with a regular and uninterrupted supply of electricity, it does not and cannot guarantee this. The *Conditions of Service* further explain that a potential claim for damages can only be successful in cases of negligence or willful misconduct on the part of the company.

Whether Hydro One made reasonable efforts, which informs if there was negligence or willful misconduct, is determined most frequently by looking at whether the company met its obligations to inspect its equipment and clear vegetation from its lines. Our investigation did not find any evidence to support Hydro One was negligent in these practices, as the company inspected its equipment and cleared vegetation from its lines in the time frames required. On this basis, we determined Hydro One was not unreasonable in its process or decision when it denied Mr. G's claim. As such, no recommendations were made by the Office.



“

Interactions with the Ombudsman’s Office are always positive, professional and I cannot say thank you enough for listening to all sides of the story and being there for both the customer and the [business] THANK YOU!”

— HYDRO ONE EMPLOYEE

Complaints by topic

Prices, rates and fees

For the third year in a row, the Office saw a decline in complaints about prices, rates, and fees. In particular, complaints about electricity prices, which peaked at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, have since decreased significantly. Although customer concerns about the cost of electricity eased, the Office continued to receive numerous complaints about Hydro One's delivery fees. These complaints were primarily from cottage owners that fell within Hydro One's Seasonal Rate Class. The common complaint for these customers is that the delivery fees paid are disproportionately high when compared to the amount of electricity being used.

The Ontario Energy Board ordered Hydro One to eliminate this Seasonal Rate Class by December 31, 2022. As of January 1, 2023, these seasonal customers were moved into one of three residential rate classes: Urban, Medium, or Low Density, based on the number of customers and distribution assets in their surrounding area. Depending on how customers are re-classified, they will see a decrease or increase to their bill. To help minimize the financial impact to those customers who experience a bill increase, Hydro One is set to gradually phase in the higher delivery charge over the next ten years. The Office will continue to monitor this implementation closely in the years ahead.



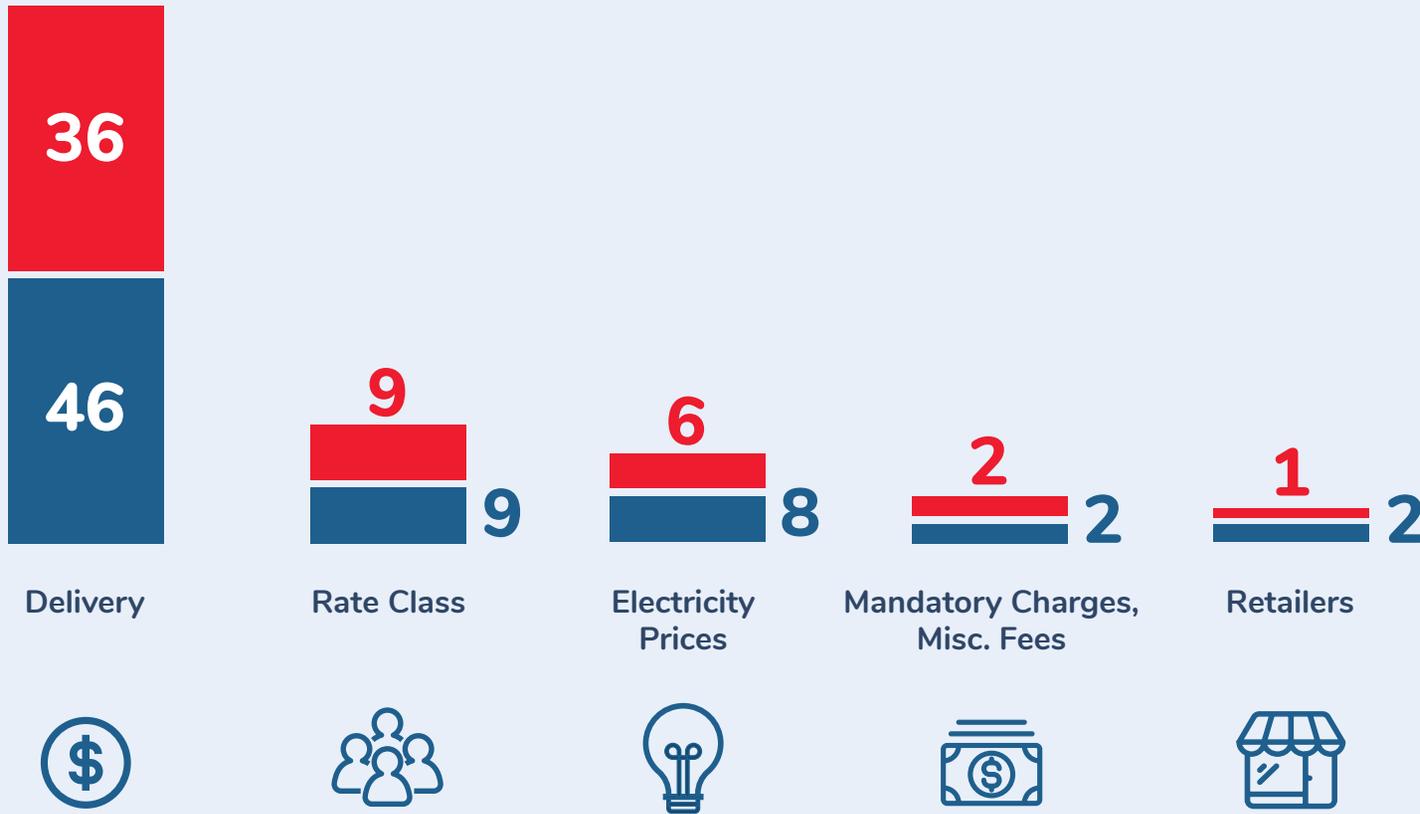
I am glad we have an Ombudsman for any issues that could arise, to offer an objective response.”

— HYDRO ONE CUSTOMER



NUMBER OF PRICES, RATES AND FEES COMPLAINTS

● 2022 ● 2021



The Ombudsman’s Office has been extremely helpful in identifying ways we can improve service to our customers.”

— HYDRO ONE EMPLOYEE



CASE STUDY

Pricing plans

Ms. A owns a seasonal property where she spends most of her summer, but during the winter she only visits on the occasional weekend. She contacted the Office after hearing customers are now able to choose between Time of Use (TOU) and Tiered pricing plans and was looking for information on what pricing plan was best for her.

The Office often gets these types of questions, but answering them is not simple or straightforward. Which pricing plan is best for a customer largely depends on the amount of electricity used and when it is consumed. Despite this, the Office provides customers with general information to help them make the best decision, including:

- There are two online tools available on HydroOne.com that enables customers to calculate the differences in the two pricing plans based on a customer's historical consumption patterns, through their myAccount profile, or hypothetical scenarios.
- TOU pricing charges different amounts for electricity, depending on the time and day you use it, while Tiered pricing charges a standard rate that increases if you pass a specific billing-period electricity consumption.
- TOU and Tiered prices are adjusted by the Ontario Energy Board ("OEB") two times a year, once in the fall and again in the spring. These prices apply to every Regulated Price Plan-eligible customer in Ontario, regardless of the distribution company - Hydro One does not set, nor can it adjust those rates. The rates are publicly available on Hydro One's website and from the OEB.
- Customers can switch from TOU to Tiered pricing at any time. However, a customer switching from Tiered to TOU must have at least 12 months of regular data reporting from their smart meter.
- Customers can switch back and forth between the two pricing plans depending on their consumption needs, and there are no costs associated with making the switch. However, these changes to a customer's pricing plan can take up to two billing cycles to take effect.



“

Everyone I have dealt with within the Office of the Hydro One Ombudsman has been so professional and kind. They ask questions that are relevant, and it shows that they care and are really looking to ensure they have all of the details.”

— HYDRO ONE EMPLOYEE

Complaints by topic

Collection activities

With society making a gradual return to pre-pandemic practices, so too have Hydro One's collection activities. While the company continued to bring a measured approach to its collections and disconnections processes, the Office saw a rise in complaints from customers facing the risk of disconnection. The Office carefully reviews these disconnection complaints, ensuring that the company has followed all the steps required by the Ontario Energy Board (OEB) before a customer is disconnected for non-payment of their bills. When Hydro One has not followed the OEB's required process, the Office recommends the company reconnect the service and correct the errors, while also looking for opportunities to strengthen Hydro One's process to avoid similar situations in the future.

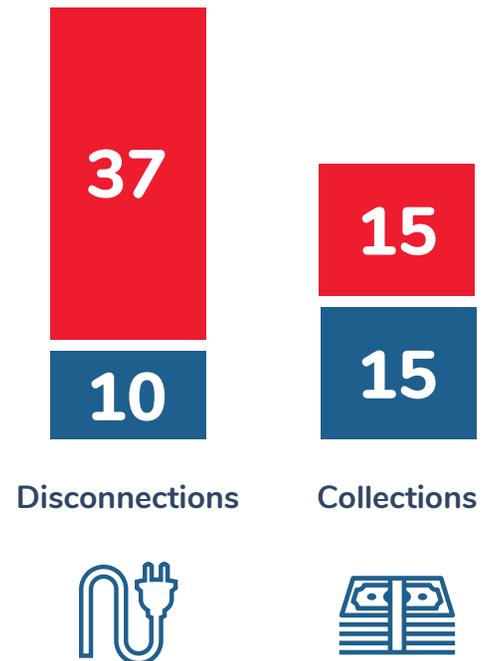
When contacted by a customer who has already been disconnected, the Office's primary role is to confirm that the customer has been billed correctly and that the company has followed the prescribed process for disconnection. Once this threshold has been met, the Office then works with the company and the customer to reach fair and reasonable terms for reconnection or avoid a pending disconnection entirely. The Office also assists by identifying and suggesting potential community services or support programs to assist with the accumulated arrears.

“ I am convinced that [the Ombudsman] and her team want to help us improve. The interaction is high pressure at times but always professional and constructive.”

— HYDRO ONE EMPLOYEE

NUMBER OF COLLECTION ACTIVITIES COMPLAINTS

● 2022 ● 2021





CASE STUDY

Improper disconnection

Ms. C is a long-time Hydro One customer who struggles with paying her monthly bills. These challenges became even more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic. By August 2022, Ms. C had been sent numerous written notifications of her arrears and of the pending disconnection. When Hydro One arrived to disconnect her electricity, Ms. C was unable to come to a payment arrangement with the company and the disconnection took place.

After the disconnection, Ms. C contacted the Office looking for assistance. Specifically, she felt it was unfair Hydro One had not provided her more notice or called with a final reminder before showing up to complete the disconnection. The Office reviewed the Ontario Energy Board's rules regarding disconnections which require a distributor to provide a customer with specific written notices, and to make reasonable efforts to advise the customer of the imminent disconnection, in-person or by telephone, at least 48 hours before it is carried out.

Our review of Hydro One's records confirmed the company had not attempted to advise Ms. C of the pending disconnection, in-person or by telephone, at least 48 hours prior to the August disconnection. This was because the phone number associated with her account had been removed after an attempt one month earlier indicated the number was "not in service." Ms. C denied her number had ever been out of service, and we confirmed it was the same number she was using to contact the Office.

Given our finding that the company had not made "reasonable efforts" to advise Ms. C of the disconnection at least 48-hours before, we recommended she be immediately reconnected. Hydro One agreed and updated its process to ensure that going forward the company attempts previous numbers where no phone numbers are currently associated to an account.



GOOD TO KNOW



Private lines

It is possible that poles and hydro lines on a customer's property may not be owned by Hydro One. Rather, it may be the property owner who unknowingly owns this equipment. This issue is important, because if the lines and poles are privately owned, it is the property owner who is responsible for maintaining them and keeping them clear of vegetation.

As set out on Hydro One's website, lines owned by the company generally run along the road, are not on private property, and service multiple customers. Alternatively, power lines that are privately owned are within an individual's property boundary and on a pole that supports overhead power lines to that individual's home or other buildings on the property. Privately owned lines generally do not supply power to other customers although neighbours may agree, among themselves, to share a customer owned line.

The Office of the Hydro One Ombudsman has seen an increase in the number of complaints from customers who are disputing whether hydro lines and poles on their property are owned by Hydro One or by them. While the information on the Hydro One website provides some general guidance to customers, ultimately, a determination of who owns poles and lines is very fact specific and dealt with on a case-by-case basis. When investigating these types of complaints, the Office looks at a number of factors including: historical mapping documents, presence of Hydro One barcodes on equipment, records of Hydro One maintaining the line or clearing vegetation, and the existence of easements related to the line and poles.

As infrastructure continues to age and needs to be repaired or replaced, these types of complaints are expected to continue to come to the Office for review.



Thank you so much for all the hard work you have done on my case... Whatever the outcome of your investigation had been, I felt that at least one person that I had spoken to during this procedure had a good grasp on what I was actually complaining about, and that was important to me.”

— HYDRO ONE CUSTOMER

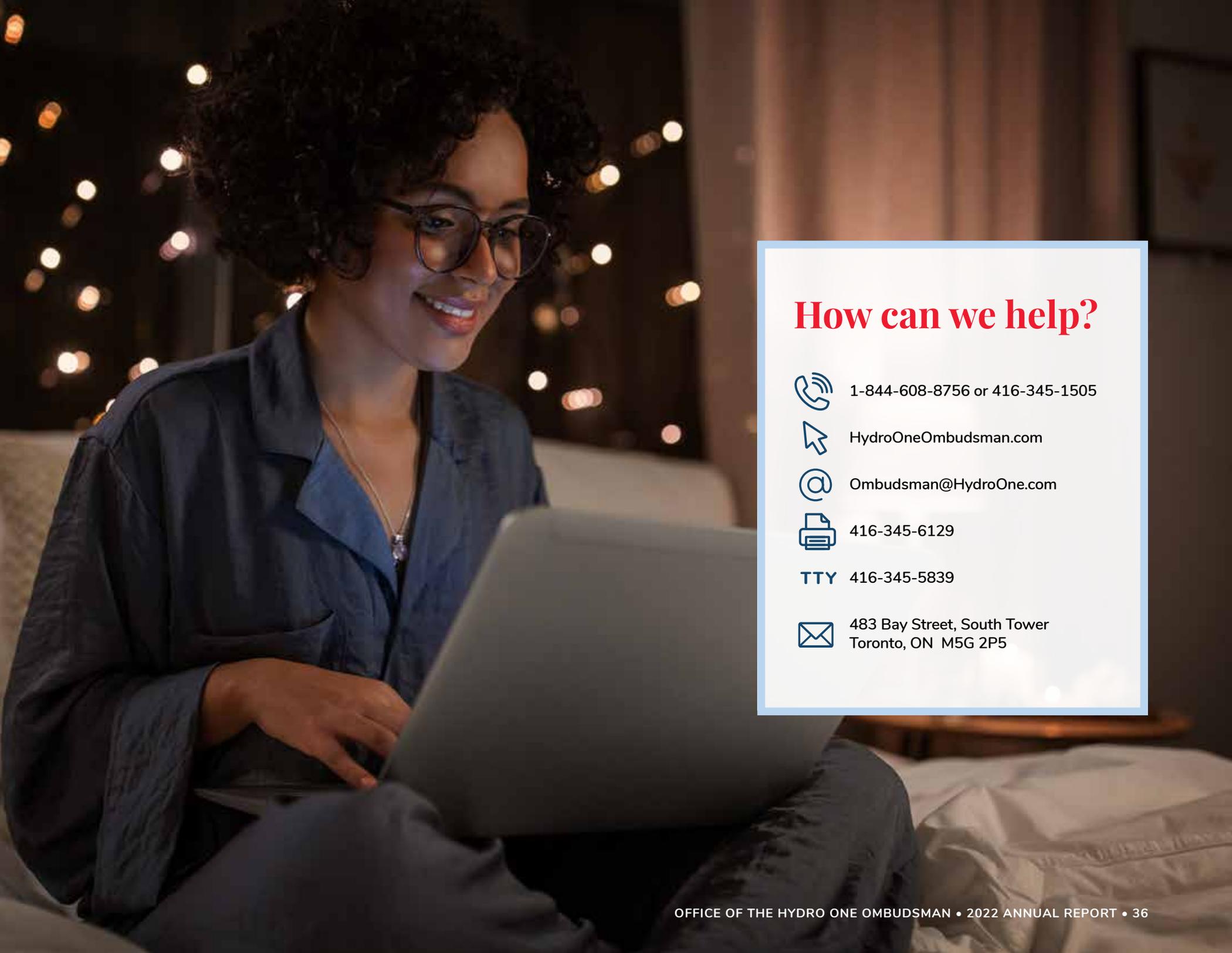
Working with the company

Since opening in March 2016, the Office has worked diligently to establish a collaborative working relationship with Hydro One. From field operations to the executive team, 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 can stem from individual complaints and address the specific unfairness experienced, or from broader trends observed where we look to make system-wide improvements.

In 2022, the Office made recommendations in 21 cases, resulting in a total of 37 recommendations made and accepted by the company. Examples of these recommendations include:

- Providing bill credits to customers who experienced poor service falling below Hydro One's own customer service guarantees.
- Reconnecting customers who were disconnected for non-payment where Hydro One had not taken reasonable steps to personally contact them 48 hours prior to disconnection.
- Ensuring that Hydro One addressed damage it caused to private property, either by providing land owners with financial compensation or by completing remedial work to restore the property to its prior condition.
- Negotiating an easement for Hydro One equipment installed on private property without both registered owner's consent.
- Correcting Hydro One's internal real estate records system regarding an ownership interest in a property.
- Prioritizing a relocation project to remove assets mistakenly put on private property.
- Adjusting contract costs for a new connection based on the terms and details of Hydro One's previously provided ball-park estimate.
- Fostering an agreement between a customer and Hydro One to address a trespass situation and facilitate the cost-effective expansion of the distribution system to connect a neighbouring property.
- Conducting a load-study to identify whether additional mitigation measures may be needed to avoid a high voltage situation and resulting damage claims.



How can we help?



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**Ensuring equity.
Delivering fairness.**

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