

Complaints against police drop after creation of civilian agency

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By **TIM FORAN**
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The Province's creation of an independent, civilian agency to oversee the investigation of public complaints against police has coincided with an almost 100 per cent drop in such complaints in Halton.

Halton Regional Police received only two public complaints in 2009 after Oct. 19, the date the Province's Office of the Independent Police Review Director (OIPRD) took over the responsibility for managing such complaints from police chiefs.

In comparison, Halton's police service received 68 public complaints last year in the nine-and-a-half months prior to the opening of the OIPRD, according to police statistics. The service received 55, 59 and 61 public complaints in the three preceding years respectively.

Staff sergeants have reported the public simply doesn't want to bother going through the new complaints process, Inspector Carol Crowe, of Halton Regional Police's professional standards bureau, told members of the police services board recently.

"What's important to the public it seems is that the service is aware of their concerns," said Crowe during a presentation on the OIPRD. "They're reluctant to bring an outside agency into it."

Previously, the service accepted any written and signed complaint from members of the public and the chief then de-

cidated if an investigation was necessary, said Crowe.

Now, complainants have to fill out a three-page form included at the back of a 15-page step-by-step brochure available at police stations and online at www.oiprd.on.ca, which is forwarded to the OIPRD. The OIPRD then decides if an investigation is necessary and it will assign that task to the same police service, another police service or do it themselves.

The brochure states people requiring assistance to fill out the prescribed form may be able to get it from a community organization or legal clinic.

The drastic drop in complaints has come as a surprise, said Crowe. The service had been warned to expect a 30 per cent increase in public complaints after the OIPRD opened, she pointed out.

That increase had been expected due to greater allowances for who can complain, she explained to the board. Under the old system, police services would only accept complaints from members of the public who had been directly affected by an officer's or service's alleged violation of the Police Services Act. However, the OIPRD now accepts complaints from third parties who had no involvement in an incident involving police.

She pointed to the example of a driver passing by an officer making an arrest at the side of the road. The driver subsequently filed a complaint that the officer was using excessive force during the arrest

and the OIPRD decided to investigate.

Halton MPP Ted Arnott, the Progressive Conservative's critic to the Attorney General, said it might be too soon to tell the ultimate reason why public com-

plaints have dropped after the OIPRD opened.

"It sounds to me like the government has bureaucratized a system," he suggested.



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