



STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

ALISTAIR COE MLA (CHAIR), MICHAEL PETERSSON MLA (DEPUTY CHAIR), ANDREW BRADDOCK MLA

Inquiry into referred 2019–20 Annual and Financial Reports and Budget Estimates 2020-21
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Asked by Peter Cain MLA on 10 March 2021:

Ref: ACT Audit Office Annual Report 2019-20, Complaints Hotline

The ACT Ombudsman complaints hotline is only open on weekdays between 10:30am - 3pm [ACT Ombudsman – Contact Us Page]. Except for the Commonwealth Ombudsman, the ACT Ombudsman operating hours for its complaint’s hotline appear to be among the shortest in the country. Comparable Ombudsman hours from other Australian states and territories operate for at-least 6 hours per weekday [Tasmania 9am-4:45pm, Victoria 10am-4pm, Queensland 10am-4pm, Western Australia 8:30am-4:30pm].

1. Why are operating hours for the ACT Ombudsman hotline comparatively low and would the Ombudsman expand the service with additional resources?
 - a. What processes does the ACT Ombudsman have in place to receive complaints outside the hotline’s operating hours?

ACT Ombudsman: The answer to the Member’s question is as follows:–

1. The ACT Ombudsman hotline is part of the broader Commonwealth Ombudsman hotline and the operating hours for the hotline were lowered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, when a large proportion of the Office’s staff were working from home. This provided an opportunity for us to encourage our customers to use our online services where we have seen an increase in the proportion of complaints received by our online form, while ensuring we have multiple options available for accessibility purposes. We then extended the hotline to the current operating hours of 10:30 – 3pm, which covered all of our peak call periods, allowing the Office to provide a reliable phone service. Currently there are only 2.4% of customers trying to contact the hotline outside of the current phone operating hours and on the whole we think we have arrived at reasonable service options for our complainants, however this is always under review.

Additional resources for the ACT Ombudsman would not have a substantive impact on the ability of the Office to extend these operating hours as the reason for the operating hours does not relate to funding but rather an opportunity to continue to encourage our customers to use all channels available to lodge a complaint, while still covering the main times that complainants phone the Office.



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

QON No. 10b

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- a. In addition to the hotline, complaints can be made by online form at any time, at <https://www.ombudsman.act.gov.au/>.

One of the benefits of the Office's online form is that it guides complainants to other complaints handling bodies, where a complaint is not within the Office's jurisdiction. Additionally, the online form asks specific questions that will help the Office assess the complaint, and can help complainants to provide relevant information, saving them time. That is, the service offer seeks to be efficient and effective, both for the Office and for people who wish to complain.

The Office recognises that making a complaint by online form is not possible for everyone, due to accessibility issues. Officers can make outbound calls to complainants during normal business hours to discuss their complaint if the complainant is unavailable between 10:30am and 3:00pm and unable to provide information about their complaint through the online form. We can also receive complaints by email or post if needed.

As at 19 March 2021, the ACT Ombudsman had not received any complaints about the hotline's operating hours.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Signature:

Date:

23.3.21

By the ACT Ombudsman, Mr Michael Manthorpe PSM