

**NEWS RELEASE**

**For immediate release**

**June 27, 2017**

**Time to modernize – Nova Scotia’s Information and Privacy Commissioner releases 2016-2017 Annual Report**

**HALIFAX** - Today, Catherine Tully, Nova Scotia’s Information and Privacy Commissioner, released her annual report for 2016-2017. As part of the report, Tully includes 34 recommendations to strengthen and modernize Nova Scotia’s access and privacy laws.

“The digital age is upon us and our laws are quite simply no longer up to the task,” Tully says in the report. “Significant improvements are required to bring our access and privacy rights into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

Tully makes recommendations to strengthen the laws by focusing on four core areas. First is to modernize access rights by taking steps such as allowing disclosure in electronic format, updating open government requirements, and requiring creation of records.

Second, Tully recommends a range of changes to privacy laws to respond to the growing reality of big data, data linking, and the collection of large databases of citizen information. Effective privacy rules can enable innovation by government while protecting citizens’ privacy. Without those fundamental protections, databases of citizen information are not adequately protected.

Tully also recommends improvements to Nova Scotia’s oversight model. These include making the Commissioner an independent officer of the legislature and strengthening the Commissioner’s recommendation power so that public bodies can no longer choose to simply ignore the recommendations.

The final area for improvement is to streamline the confusing array of laws governing access and privacy in Nova Scotia. Tully recommends one standalone access and privacy act to cover all institutions, and a regular review of the “repeal by degrees” that happens when provisions of new legislation override the existing *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

“I am optimistic that the recommendations I have made to modernize our laws will prompt a robust conversation about the strengths and weaknesses of our access and privacy laws. I am hopeful that the conversation will lead to a consensus that it is indeed time to improve our laws.”

In addition to recommendations for improvement, the annual report highlights another year of growing demand for the services of the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner (OIPC).

“Whatever the shortcomings of our access and privacy laws, over the last year, Nova Scotians have shown that they expect their rights to be protected,” Tully says in the report. “The demands for our services, both as a proactive advisor and a reactive oversight authority, showed significant growth again in 2016-2017.”

In 2016-2017, the OIPC managed a caseload 93% higher than it was in 2014. Despite the increase in demand, the backlog of cases has been substantially reduced, with only a handful of files dating to 2014 still active. Once assigned, OIPC staff resolve matters within an average of 67 days. This year, the OIPC resolved a total of 528 matters, a 14% increase over last year.

At the same time, the OIPC has significantly increased its proactive approach to oversight. In 2016-2017, the office completed 178 outreach projects such as creating new tools, delivering speeches, developing and delivering training, and media interviews. In total, 1454 Nova Scotians took part in events led by OIPC staff.

The Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner is responsible for monitoring and overseeing compliance with four access and privacy statutes in Nova Scotia. In discharging its mandate, the OIPC investigates and mediates access appeals and complaints, conducts formal hearings, issues recommendation reports, conducts privacy investigations, comments on the privacy implications of new programs, policies and technologies, and conducts public education.

-30-

For more information, contact:

Catherine Tully  
Information and Privacy Commissioner for Nova Scotia  
Phone: 902-424-4684  
Email: [oipecns@novascotia.ca](mailto:oipecns@novascotia.ca)  
Twitter: [@NSInfoPrivacy](https://twitter.com/NSInfoPrivacy)

