



**OMBUDSPERSON**  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

# BUDGET SUBMISSION

## 2024/25 • 2026/27

Presented to the Select Standing Committee on  
Finance and Government Services

**October 2023**





Our office is located on the unceded traditional lands of the Lək'wəŋən (Lekwungen) People and ancestors and our work extends across the homelands of the Indigenous Peoples within what we now call British Columbia. We honour the many territorial keepers of the lands and waters where we work.

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# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

An independent officer of the Legislature, the Ombudsperson delivers services under two provincial laws.

Under the *Ombudsperson Act*, in force since 1979, the Ombudsperson investigates complaints of unfair or unreasonable treatment by provincial and local public authorities and provides general oversight of the administrative fairness of government processes. The Ombudsperson conducts three types of investigations: investigations into individual complaints; investigations that are commenced on the Ombudsperson's own initiative; and investigations referred to the Ombudsperson by the Legislative Assembly or one of its Committees. The Ombudsperson has a broad mandate to investigate complaints involving provincial ministries; provincial boards and commissions; Crown corporations; local governments; health authorities; colleges and universities; schools and school boards; and self-regulating professions and occupations. A full list of authorities can be found in the *Ombudsperson Act*. The Office of the Ombudsperson responds to approximately 8,000 enquiries and complaints annually.

Under the *Public Interest Disclosure Act* the Ombudsperson investigates allegations of wrongdoing from public employees in or relating to a public body covered by the Act as well as allegations of reprisal. This is recent legislation. Phase One came into force in 2019. The government has established a seven-phase rollout across the broader public sector, with three phases remaining, and we are in the final year of the legislation covering all the public bodies it is intended to cover.

In addition to funding salary adjustments, this budget request seeks funding in two areas:

- To continue the work of our Indigenous Communities Services Plan (ICSP) in order to increase awareness and trust in our services among Indigenous people in the spirit of Reconciliation.
- A focused Strategic Outreach Plan to develop outreach to six underserved demographics and to implement the communication aspects of the office's Accessibility Plan required under the *Accessible BC Act*.

The Office also hosts Corporate Shared Services (CSS) that provides administrative services to 4 independent offices. The funding allocated to each of the Ombudsperson operations (investigative support) and the CSS organization (shared administrative services) are included for information as Appendix 1.

# 2.0 SUMMARY OF BUDGET PROPOSAL

This budget request is for \$14,775,000 in operating funding for each of the next 3 fiscal years starting in 2024/25 and a capital budget request of \$102,000 in 2024/25, \$163,000 in 2025/26 and \$81,000 in 2026/27. A supplemental request of \$513,000 for the 2023/24 fiscal year to cover wage inflation for July increments in 2023 is included in the request. The Office of the Ombudsperson hosts Corporate Shared Services

(CSS) that provides administrative services to 4 independent offices, the costs are split between Ombudsperson operations and 3 other client offices.

A summary of the new budget requests are provided in the following Table 1. Funding requests already reviewed and approved by the Committee are identified in Table 2.

**Table 1 - Summary Budget Request – New Funding 2024/25 (in \$000s)**

	Operating	% Change Operating	Capital
Starting budget with previously approved funding	<b>13,674</b>		<b>93</b>
New – Annualized impact of July 1, 2023 non-Schedule A wage inflation increase	692	5.06%	-
New - Non wage inflation adjustments - rent/capital	19	0.14%	5
<b>A) Total inflation funding request</b>	<b>14,385</b>	<b>5.20%</b>	<b>98</b>
New key request - Outreach	146	1.01%	2
New Key request - Indigenous Communities Service Plan	244	1.70%	2
<b>B) Total budget including new key requests</b>	<b>14,775</b>	<b>7.91%</b>	<b>102</b>

## A) Inflation funding requests

a) **New request \$692,000 as a result of July 1, 2023 wage inflation** - In Fiscal 2023/24, consistent with public service policies, there was an increment provided to non-Schedule A staff in July 2023 which was equal to a 7.15% lift. Included in this request is a \$20,000 adjustment for STOB 51 which covers payments to staff on maternity/parental leave. This is required with the increase in staff and salary lifts, we have been historically underfunded in this area. As with past budgeting practice, a funding request for this wage inflation was not included in past budget submissions - only requests for known increments are made to

this Committee. The financial impact of this incremental request is \$692,000. In addition to an annual increase being requested for fiscal 2024/25, a supplemental request is being made for 2023/24 in the amount of \$513,000 as indicated in the Excel templates submitted as part of this budget package.

b) **New request \$19,000 operating and \$5,000 in Capital for non-wage Inflation adjustments** - New request for an increase in the operating portion of the building occupancy costs for inflation and a minor adjustment to capital reflecting the net change in priorities for asset replacement.

## B) New key requests

a) **Strategic Outreach** - Funding of \$146,000 in operating and \$2,000 in capital for 1 FTE. This is a funding request supporting the 2021 – 2026 Strategic Plan. As previously presented, the awareness of our office and its services is relatively low: just 17% of the population is aware of the office and 2/3 of British Columbians do not believe there is an agency that can assist people with disputes they have with public bodies. This low level of awareness means that many people, including those in vulnerable situations are not accessing the problem resolution services of the office. Thus, their issues are either left unresolved or are being addressed in a far more expensive manner through the courts. Following the committee declining to fund the Outreach Plan for 2023/24, we are returning with a more modest and cost effective version of the plan. There are two features to this outreach plan, increase awareness amongst six demographics who would benefit from our services and strengthening the accessibility of the office's public-facing materials. Without this funding, the majority of British Columbians will remain unaware of

the services offered by our office and result in disadvantaged individuals being subjected to administrative unfairness without the ability to seek assistance. See the accompanying proposed Strategic Outreach Plan for additional details.

b) **Indigenous Services** - Funding of \$244,000 in operating and \$2,000 in capital to sustain and continue developing a comprehensive Indigenous Communities Service Plan. – This funding request will allow us to monitor and track our progress; inform our strategies; revise or refocus our priorities; and reveal new areas for action to enhance positive impact. The funding will be used to deepen our connection with Indigenous communities, adapt and enhance our services to respond and respect the inherent rights of Indigenous people, promote fairness for Indigenous people and transform the way we work to advance our inclusive work culture. Internal reallocation of 2 FTEs has significantly reduced the total funding request for this initiative. See the attached Indigenous Communities Services Plan for additional details.

**Table 2: Summary Budget Request - Funding Previously Approved (in \$000s)**

<b>Base Budget 2024/25</b>	Operating	% Change Operating	Capital
Funding approved in December 2022 for 2024/25	<b>12,773</b>		<b>88</b>
Reduction in recoveries	26	0.20%	6
Annualized salaries for previously approved positions started part way through 2023/24	175	1.37%	(10)
New positions for Public Interest Disclosure Legislation	362	2.83%	9
Planned reduction of funding for Case Tracker Replacement project	(255)	-2.00%	-
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>13,081</b>	<b>2.41%</b>	<b>93</b>
Supplemental funding previously approved	463	3.54%	-
Supplemental funding previously approved	130	0.99%	-
<b>C) Total previously approved funding</b>	<b>13,674</b>	<b>6.94%</b>	<b>93</b>

### C) Previously approved funding

- a) **Base Funding** approved in December 2022 for 2024/25 - \$308,000 total increase in operating funding and \$5,000 increase in capital funding - This funding was presented in the fall of 2022:
- i) \$26,000 in funding was provided to cover the 2% minimum known salary lift for Schedule A positions effective April 1, 2024 and a reduction in the recoveries that supported the Case Tracker system in another jurisdiction.
  - ii) \$175,000 in annualized funding was provided for PID resources that were partially funded in 2023/24. 3 FTE's were funded to start in October 2024, part way through the fiscal year. This request was previously approved to ensure a full 12 months of funding is available.
  - iii) \$362,000 for PID resources was approved to start on April 1, 2024 – representing colleges and universities to be covered by the legislation.
  - iv) Decrease of \$255,000 - Return of Operating funding related to the Case Tracker replacement project - this funding was approved as a reduction as the work on the Case Tracker replacement system is substantially completed. This line shows the reduction is on schedule and does not need to be amended.
- b) **Supplemental funding** approved early in 2023 calendar year. Two supplemental requests were approved early in 2023:
- i) \$463,000 in April 2023 – Funding was approved for salary increments that were not known during the presentation made in October 2022. This request covered



the Non-Schedule A salary increases identified in November of 2022 and the Schedule A increase effective April 1, 2023. Supplemental funding was approved in April 2023 for the 2023/24 fiscal year only.

- ii) \$130,000 - In February 2023 this funding was approved in support of a facilities solution that impacted three offices (Ombudsperson, Police Complaint Commissioner and the Representative for Children and Youth). This funding allowed for the Ombudsperson to assume space previously vacated by the Police Complaint Commissioner until a long-term lease solution is reached for the Ombudsperson. Revised costing of this solution will be made when a joint plan with real Property Division is developed.

## Efficiencies and savings

### Internal review of expenditures and case load

– A review of expenditures has identified a decreased requirement for investigative resources related to Public Interest Disclosure. While workload continues to increase, the increase has not been as sharp as originally projected. Therefore, we have decreased our projected requirements for fiscal year 2024/25 and used those savings to decrease the funding requested under the Indigenous Communities Service Plan.

**Cost Avoidance** - Efficiencies and savings achieved to date have been in cost avoidance. For example, investigators are versatile in that they can conduct investigations across or be reassigned to multiple teams to cover vacancies and address workload; staff are not “locked into” one part of the organization. There is also anticipated cost avoidance in the use of the new case tracker system where data can be automatically populated into the new system vs manually typing information. This will mitigate

future requirements to add intake staff resulting from growth. In addition to these specific items, the office participates in a shared service model where costs for administrative services (Human Resources, Finance, Information Technology and Facilities) are shared between 4 offices, reducing the funds dedicated to support positions to this office.

## Risks

The primary risk in this budget is at the time of submission, not all authorities have been brought under the *Public Interest Disclosure Act* legislation. We have not included any additional resources that may be needed for future investigations although there are increasing numbers of disclosures being made to my office. Indeed we have reduced two PID investigator positions scheduled to be added in 2024/25. While this appears manageable, this increases risk to this submission. This is something we will monitor going forward and seek solutions that may include requesting additional funding at a later date, if necessary.

In addition, this request does not build any salary increments for staff in non-Schedule A classifications scheduled to be implemented in July of 2024. When any such salary lift is known, a funding request will be made. If an amount is known early, this may be the subject of a supplemental funding request in the spring of 2024 for the 2024/25 fiscal year and addressed in the next formal appearance before the Committee for the subsequent fiscal years.

The office is currently in the final two years of our facilities lease and will be working with Real Property Division to secure longer term facilities arrangements. Options are being explored this fall and any potential financial impact will be known later this fiscal year.

## D) STOB analysis of Budget

The increased funding requests focus on addressing wage inflation, the Indigenous Communities Service Plan and outreach work

required of our office. See the financial reporting templates and business cases for detailed information.

## E) STOB Analysis of Previous Year's Actuals

The expenditures to last year's budget was managed to within 0.29% of the overall budget.

- a) STOB 51 - Primary expenditures here relate to maternity and parental leave, increased staff and wage inflation has added a cost pressure here.
- b) STOB 55 - Reduced expenditures relating to the Indigenous Communities Service Plan and the initial consultation work in establishing the program is now completed.
- c) STOB 57 - Increased travel expenses to assist investigations following an extended period of reduced travel due to the pandemic.
- d) STOB 60 - Minor increase in the use of contracted service providers to complete one-time tasks like security assessment and engagement strategy.
- e) STOB 63 - Increased expenditure in systems operations due to externally sourced IT readiness assessment done as well as increased staff and licensing cost for the new case tracker system.
- f) STOB 67 - Savings in information advertising and publications through reduced reliance on paper copies of reports.
- g) STOB 68 - Reduced costs in publishing of the annual report with work completed in house.
- h) STOB 69 - Minor increase in subscription information services
- i) STOB 88 - Increase in recoveries through the Corporate Shared Services agreement with other three offices as resources were approved in the 2022/23 budget.
- j) STOB 90 - increased recoveries for support of the Case Tracker System licensed by two organizations in Saskatchewan. This arrangement will conclude in the fiscal 2023/24 year.
- k) Capital STOBs - Overall capital spending managed to the bottom line with an increase in office furniture expenditures for incremental staff offset by a decrease in IT expenditures.

# APPENDIX I

## Appendix 1 – Operating Budget Split between Ombudsperson Operations and Corporate Shared Services (in \$000s)

STOB	Description	Ombudsperson Operations	Corporate Shared Services	Total Budget Request
50	Salaries	7,906	2,409	10,315
51	Supplemental Salary	98	10	108
52	Benefits	2,159	614	2,773
54	Officer Salary	324	-	324
55	Boards and Commissions	-	-	-
57	Travel	97	4	101
60	Professional Serv.	374	10	384
63	Info. Systems	560	76	636
65	Office & Business	307	50	357
67	Info, Adv.& Public's	69	-	69
68	Statutory Public	3	-	3
69	Utilities, Materials	40	2	42
73	Amortization	178	-	178
75	Building Occupancy	1,157	5	1,162
85	Other	-	-	-
	<b>Subtotal</b>	13,272	3,180	16,452
88	Internal Recoveries	-	(1,676)	(1,676)
90	External Recoveries	(1)	-	(1)
	<b>Total</b>	13,271	1,504	14,775

