



OMBUDSPERSON
BRITISH COLUMBIA

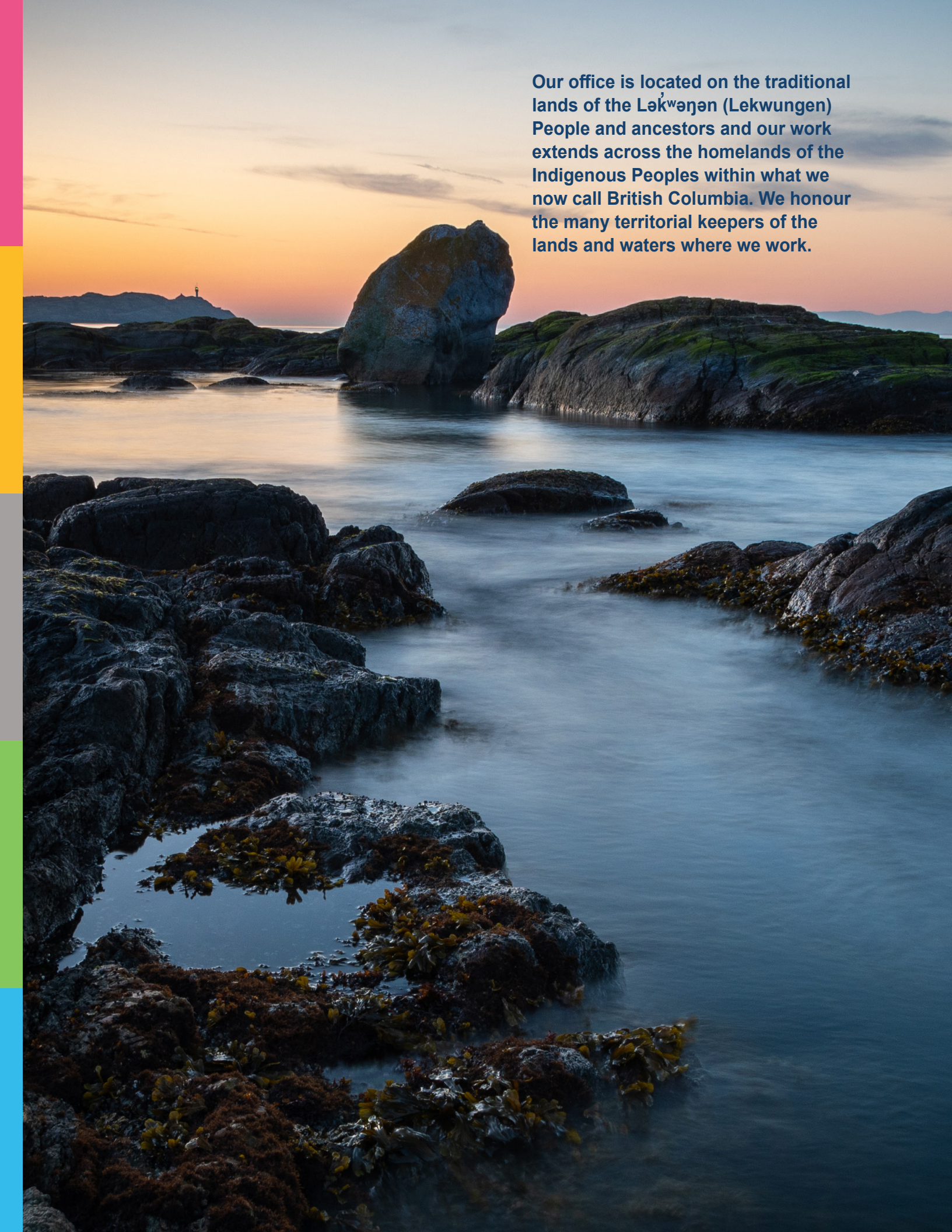
BUDGET SUBMISSION

2026/27 • 2028/29

Presented to the Select Standing Committee
on Finance and Government Services

October 2025





Our office is located on the traditional lands of the Lək̓ʷəŋən (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.

BUDGET SUBMISSION SUMMARY – OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSPERSON

1. Staffing overview

In 2025/26 the total number of FTEs in the Office of the Ombudsperson is 122.50. Within this total, 30 are Schedule A positions and the balance are in non-bargaining unit classifications. Out of the total, 29 positions provide Human Resources, IM/IT and Finance support to four independent offices within the Corporate Shared Services (CSS) model. See Appendix for allocation of FTEs between Ombudsperson operations and CSS.

2. Summary of the budget proposal

Summary of the funding request

Table 1: Overview of budget proposal – fiscal 2026/27 (in \$000s)

	Operating	Operating % change from 2025/26	Capital	Capital % change from 2025/26
Budget 2026/27 starting point*	16,683		163	
Wage inflation - Schedule A	41	0.25%	-	
Wage inflation – Excluded (non-bargaining classification)	218	1.30%	-	
Wage inflation – Statutory Officer	10	0.06%	-	
Non-wage inflation	52	0.31%	-	
Subtotal (inflation only)	17,004	1.92%	163	0.00%
Issue critical to support core functions/existing operations	435	2.61%	6	3.68%
Capital Adjustments - (done annually)	-	-	(82)	-50.31%
Total budget request*	17,439	4.53%	87	-46.63%

*See Appendix for breakdown of the 2025/26 budget and 2026/27 budget request between Ombudsperson operations and CSS.

Key assumptions associated with this budget request

- In fiscal year 2025/26 our funding request for 4.2% to cover inflation pressures was denied and reduced to 2%. The shortfall in inflation funding effectively represents a base budget reduction.
- The Office of the Ombudsperson is a demand-driven service responding to individuals who have complaints about BC public bodies. Experience indicates two factors –

public service *changes* and public service *cutbacks* – result in people turning to our office for assistance. We are in an environment where both factors are occurring – ongoing instability to public services and fiscal restraint-induced service reductions. As government budgets shrink and recruitment freezes lead to smaller workforces, service delivery by over 1,000 public bodies is being adversely affected. This, in turn, leads to an increase in the number and complexity of complaints received by our office. This “pressure valve” demand for Ombudsperson services means that budget demands on the Ombudsperson are counter-cyclical when compared to the broader public sector fiscal environment. In order to address this demand the Ombudsperson must be resourced appropriately to assist individuals in a timely and effective manner. This impact is both broad (potentially impacting *all* public services) and deep (often involving expenditure restraints to essential services impacting life, health and safety such as income assistance or health care).

- We have engaged in successful outreach efforts to various underserved populations over the past 2 years and these efforts continue with the support of the Committee. While awareness across the province of our office remains low, our outreach efforts are having a positive, gradual impact and leading to increased complaints from these underserved populations. To gain and maintain trust with individuals who complain to us, we must deliver high quality, culturally safe, trauma-informed services. This requires an appropriate level of resourcing that is proportional to the increase in awareness of and access to our services.

Significant changes in the Office of the Ombudsperson in the last fiscal year

Fiscal year 2024/25 saw a notable increase in the complexity of complaints we received and an increase in complex and challenging behaviour from those seeking assistance from our office, leading to additional service delivery pressures.

Public body internal complaint systems are insufficient. With increased strain on public services and overburdened complaint mechanisms in those public bodies, we are accepting a larger number of complaints for investigation for two main reasons: first, when the public body refers complainants to our office due to their own overburdened complaint mechanisms and second, where we determine that referring a complainant back to the public body may cause them further harm due to such circumstances as multi-generational trauma.

Our complaints are becoming more substantive and more complex. As a result of operational enhancements – such as our online [Complaint Checker](#) – and targeted outreach to communities that experience barriers to accessing fair public services, we are seeing an increase in the proportion of complaints coming to our office that are within our jurisdiction and therefore, moving to investigation. This has the effect of driving the more difficult, longer-term and intractable complaints to our office, which take longer to assess and are more challenging to resolve, and where necessary, to investigate.

Complainants are increasingly in crisis. We continue to see a rise in the number of people approaching our office in crisis and experiencing mental health challenges. Effectively communicating with individuals in crisis requires more time and care to identify the issue,

obtain the information from the complainant that we need to do our work, and communicate outcomes.

PIDA work is expanding. Fiscal year 20204/25 saw the final two phases of the seven-phase implementation of the *Public Interest Disclosure Act*, which expanded coverage of the Act during the year to health agencies, boards and commissions, BC's post-secondary education sector, including public universities and colleges; and WorkSafe BC. This resulted in a record high number of wrongdoing disclosures to our office.

Steps we took to find savings and efficiencies

We conducted a detailed review of prior years' expenditures, reallocating funding from underspent areas to cover areas where we anticipate a higher spending rate, including:

- Re-allocating savings from a reduction in building occupancy fixed costs to address cost pressures.
- A detailed review of amortization costs leading to a transfer of savings to offset cost pressures.
- Reviewing historic contract expenditures to allow for cost reallocation to cover cost pressures. This eliminates a buffer that is in place to offset unexpected legal costs should they be incurred, increasing the office's financial risk exposure.
- A review of historic spending in IMIT systems costs, reallocating funding to help offset cost pressures. We have reduced our funding request for the 2026/27 budget submission, removing two projects proposed for that year under the IT modernization portfolio. The work will be completed over a longer period of time with internal resources.

We also changed some internal processes to avoid increased costs as part of our continuous improvement efforts to enhance workflow efficiencies. For example:

- Our intake team has supported by our continuous improvement analyst, reviewed workflows and identified more efficient processes, including triaging, scheduling, and updating response templates to ensure the quickest service in light of high complaint volumes. We have also trained and supported intake staff to advise complainants as early as possible if their complaint is not suitable for investigation so that they can pursue other methods of resolution.
- We reallocated a portion of intake resources to establish a complaints analyst role to conduct immediate triage of telephone calls, transferring to our early resolution officers only those jurisdictional complaints that require their further analysis. We have also operationalized an intake team lead model following a successful pilot project that demonstrated efficiencies gained in staff supervision and training.
- We have reviewed, updated and expanded information contained in our online Complaint Checker to ensure the public can get current information about the most

common referrals we provide during office hours, at the time that is most convenient for them, without the need to contact our office directly.

- We have implemented two measures on our phone lines to increase intake call management efficiency; a spam screener and an introductory message for callers explaining what we can and cannot help with, including examples of the most common non-jurisdictional issues and how to raise those concerns (e.g. police, federal government, private businesses).
- We have removed email as a means of complaint submission in favour of our webform, which has proven to be more effective than email in capturing all pertinent information for digital complaint submissions. This reduces the need to contact complainants to obtain missing information we need to do our work.
- Wherever financially advantageous, we are completing work in-house with existing resources instead of contracting external vendors for assistance, such as technical changes to our case management system.
- We have indefinitely deferred a peer review that was planned as part of our ongoing work on an outcomes-based measurement framework, to reallocate funds to more operationally critical areas.

In addition to the above, and specifically related to *Public Interest Disclosure Act* investigations, as we have gained experience under the new act we have:

- Increased discretionary decision-making delegation to both managers and disclosure analysts to increase timeliness and efficiency.
- Streamlined our internal approval process and our investigation report writing process to more efficiently integrate evidence as it is obtained in relation to the analysis and conclusions reached.
- Identified disclosure topics that could be better addressed by professional regulatory bodies and amended our investigation approach accordingly.
- Reviewed investigation planning and practice to obtain required information more quickly, implementing methods to ensure appropriate investigation scope.
- Included proposed amendments in a submission to the Legislature's Special Committee to Review the *Public Interest Disclosure Act* that could increase efficiency and effectiveness.

Budget increases over prior year

Increases in operating costs relate to the following items:

- **Wage inflation:** A factor of 2% was included in the budget submission based on the BC Stats consumer price index. At the time this submission has been prepared, there has been no wage settlement for BCGEU positions, which will typically inform the figures for overall inflation.

- **Non-wage inflation:** A factor of 2% has also been applied to expenditures that have an increase in unit costs.
- **Critical support for core functions/existing operations:** The Office of the Ombudsperson operates a demand-driven service. Currently, complaints about public bodies requiring investigation that do not engage life, health or safety or are otherwise critical, are generally not assigned for months. This delay is not appropriate given that often, the underlying complaint by the public is about delays by a public body. We have identified two essential and cost-effective approaches to address this pressure:
 - Two investigators to address the timeliness shortfall presented above. This is to cover the current increase in complexity of complaints that has led to an increase in the number of complaints investigated and the length of time those investigations take. Ombudsperson work is counter-cyclical: Demand for our services increases when public bodies reduce their workforce and services. The office is required to ensure public bodies maintain services at or above the minimum fairness thresholds set out in the *Ombudsperson Act* despite these budget reductions. This counter-cyclical impact, in turn, increases the workload for the Office of the Ombudsperson.
 - One additional manager of investigations to ensure optimal team sizes in order to maximize the pace of investigations and file closures, thereby reducing the time complaints spend in queue before an investigation is commenced. Managers play a critical role in training investigators and managing organizational risk through investigation reviews. This will support more timely conclusions of investigations once they are commenced. This will also address the current and emerging need to upskill and orient teams towards complaints related to digital government services.

The budget request to address capital costs has decreased. Within the Corporate Shared Services model, each office rotates in the purchasing of equipment required to maintain IT infrastructure. For fiscal 2026/27 the need for the Office of the Ombudsperson to contribute funding has decreased from the prior year.

3. STOB analysis of budget proposal

Changes to salary budget (STOB 50 – 54)

Two factors are contributing to this increase: First, inflation is estimated at 2% of base salaries (\$269,000). As noted above, the actual increases are not known at this time until Schedule A and non-bargaining unit classifications are announced by government external to our office. Additionally, the office is requesting the approval of funding to support core functions/existing operations with an increase of two investigators and one investigation team manager.

The STOB 52 employee benefits for the statutory officer are 26% of the benefits of the salary cost in STOB 54 (\$108,000).

No funding other than 2% inflation, is requested for in-band increases at this time. It is uncertain that these costs can be funded through budget reallocations, yet we will make efforts to find efficiencies to meet these obligations in the budget year. Whether this is sustainable for subsequent fiscal years will be addressed in the 2027/28 budget request.

4. STOB analysis of previous year's actuals

A detailed explanation is available in the supplemental budget tables. Overall, the office managed its operational budget to one percent of the approved budget.

Appendix: Budget request by area

STOB		Ombudsperson Operations			Corporate Shared Services			Total		
		Fiscal 2025/26 Budget* (Current Year)	Fiscal 2026/27 Budget Request	Change	Fiscal 2025/26 Budget* (Current Year)	Fiscal 2026/27 Budget Request	Change	Fiscal 2025/26 Budget* (Current Year)	Fiscal 2026/27 Budget Request	Change
50	Salaries	8,976	9,449	473	2,764	2,851	87	11,740	12,300	560
51	Supplemental Salary	98	100	2	10	10	-	108	110	2
52	Benefits	2,462	2,587	125	705	728	23	3,167	3,315	148
54	Officer Salary	414	422	8	-	-	-	414	422	8
55	Boards and Commissions	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
57	Travel	97	99	2	4	4	-	101	103	2
60	Professional Serv.	354	361	7	10	10	-	364	371	7
63	Info. Systems	743	773	30	50	51	1	793	824	31
65	Office & Business	337	353	16	50	51	1	387	404	17
67	Info, Adv. & Publications	69	70	1	-	-	-	69	70	1
68	Statutory Publications	3	3	-	-	-	-	3	3	-
69	Utilities, Materials, Supplies	40	41	1	2	2	-	42	43	1
73	Amortization	185	191	6	-	-	-	185	191	6
75	Building Occupancy	1,176	1,189	13	5	5	-	1,181	1,194	13
85	Other Expenses	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal		14,954	15,638	684	3,600	3,712	112	18,554	19,350	796
88		-	-	-	(1,870)	(1,910)	(40)	(1,870)	(1,910)	(40)
90		(1)	(1)	-	-	-	-	(1)	(1)	-
Total		14,953	15,637	684	1,730	1,802	72	16,683	17,439	756
FTEs		93.50	96.50	3.00	29.00	29.00	-	122.50	125.50	3.00

*The 2025/26 budget includes approved supplemental funding, less any one-time amounts.



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