

ATTENTION NEWS EDITORS: Embargoed until 11 a.m., Tuesday, August 25

**Ontario Ombudsman urges stricter controls on colleges:
Cambrian left students unqualified; Ministry “abdicated responsibility”**

TORONTO (August 25, 2009) – Ontario Ombudsman André Marin today issued a strong back-to-school warning to the provincial government to keep a closer eye on colleges, to ensure students are getting the education they pay for.

“Ontarians are entitled to expect more of their institutions,” Mr. Marin says in *Too Cool For School Too*, his second report in as many months involving Ontario’s Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. “Students should be entitled to look to the Ministry to ensure that their interests as education consumers are protected. However, if what occurred with Cambrian College is typical, it is clear that the Ministry’s oversight offers little comfort.”

The Ombudsman recommended that Cambrian College, based in Sudbury, compensate students who attended its two-year Health Information Management program, only to discover they were unqualified for the lucrative jobs the college had touted. Unlike similar programs at other Ontario colleges, Cambrian’s was never recognized by the national association that controls entry into the profession. As a result, the students could not write the certification exam or secure the kind of work in the hospital records sector that Cambrian showcased in its recruitment literature.

The Ombudsman’s investigation, conducted by the Special Ombudsman Response Team (SORT), was launched last year after 13 of the program’s students complained, many saying they had wasted two years and thousands of dollars on a worthless education. The Ombudsman found Cambrian’s conduct toward the “unsuspecting students” was unreasonable, unjust and wrong. “Cambrian College has consistently denied any responsibility for the plight of its graduates,” Mr. Marin notes in the report.

In its final response to the Ombudsman, Cambrian said it disagreed with his recommendation for compensation, but would contact affected students “to determine ways to find further resolution to their concerns.” It has apparently begun approaching students since the completion of the Ombudsman’s report.

As for the Ministry, it has “abdicated any responsibility to ensure that a college actually delivers a program,” Mr. Marin found. In the Cambrian case, it “opened the purse strings and shelled out the cash without taking any steps to ensure that the college followed through In the end, it was the students and graduates of the program who suffered.”

While the Ministry denied there were any systemic problems in its monitoring of colleges, it stressed it was committed to greater accountability and revised its policy directive with regard to colleges' responsibilities in marketing programs. The Ombudsman called this response disappointing.

"I continue to believe that in order to protect Ontario's students, and at the same time, ensure value for money for Ontario's taxpayers, greater Ministry oversight is necessary in this area," he said, noting he will continue to monitor the Ministry's actions.

Too Cool For School Too follows the Ombudsman's July 2009 report, *Too Cool For School*, in which he called on the government to keep closer watch on private career colleges. The title of both reports refers to an arrogant attitude expressed by college operators. In the first case, the Ministry allowed the private career college Bestech Academy to operate illegally for two years in the Hamilton-Niagara area before it abruptly shut down, leaving students inadequately trained and out of pocket.

The Ministry refused to compensate the Bestech students, but committed to making other improvements and to reporting regularly to the Ombudsman on its progress.

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Full report and backgrounders available at www.ombudsman.on.ca
Video of Mr. Marin's conference will be on the website and YouTube later today.

For further information or to arrange media interviews with Mr. Marin, please contact:

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