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OMBUDSMAN TABLES ANNUAL REPORT, LOOKS TO THE FUTURE

VICTORIA – B.C. Ombudsman Kim Carter today released her office's 2005 Annual Report, which outlines the Office of the Ombudsman's achievements in 2005.

By 2005, the Office of the Ombudsman had emerged from a period of considerable change. Budget cuts in 2003 and 2004 resulted in the closure of the office's Vancouver location, a reduction in staff and the creation of mobile intake clinics as an innovative way of serving the public. Throughout, the office remained focused on its commitment to ensuring fairness and accountability for all British Columbians dealing with public agencies.

The new Ombudsman acknowledged her predecessor Howard Kushner's leadership during this challenging time saying, "Howard has left an organization that is in remarkable shape given the nature and speed of the changes it has undergone."

The Office of the Ombudsman received over 7,500 new complaints and enquiries in 2005 and saw an increase in matters requiring investigation. While the majority of complaints involved provincial ministries, commissions and boards, the office also dealt with complaints about Crown corporations, health authorities, municipalities, school boards, colleges, universities, and professional associations. Among the resolutions obtained were reinstatement of payments; provision of reasons for decisions; waiving of debt and apologies. In a number of cases the complaints led to systemic improvements.

The new Ombudsman sees the work outlined in this 2005 report not only as a basis for reflection but also pointing to the office's future work. "One of the priorities for my term as Ombudsman is outreach and communication," said Carter. "Creating a dialogue with interested parties, including administrative fairness stakeholders, authorities and non-profit groups will increase the public understanding of our office and assist in focusing our efforts on urgent and important issues."

The Annual Report is available from the Office of the Ombudsman or at its website at www.ombudsman.bc.ca.

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