



Ghosted! Why do Complainants Disappear and What Are the Ombuds' Responsibilities When This Happens?

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ABSTRACT

Ombuds are familiar with this scenario: matters brought to the attention of the office, by webform, email, letter, phone or even fax, where after initial contact the individual simply disappears. The ombuds has been ghosted. Staff may be left wondering and asking, what happened? Did we do something wrong? Did we do enough? Perhaps more importantly, what are we supposed to do now? This article provides insights into why complaints might be abandoned and an overview of some common practices of ombuds offices in reporting on, and responding to, these types of complaints. This article also includes suggestions for assessing an ombuds' obligations in relation to the underlying concerns and examples from Patient Ombudsman, an ombuds office created by provincial legislation to receive and help to resolve complaints about health care experiences in Ontario, Canada.

Ombuds, Reporting, Abandoned, Withdrawn, Complaint handling, Case management

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This topic was originally presented at the Saint Paul University Centre for Information Dispute Resolution Ombuds conference in Ottawa, Canada on May 7, 2024, with thanks to attendees for their insights, and also to the team at Patient Ombudsman.



Ghosting “describe(s) the practice of suddenly ending all communication and avoiding contact with another person without any apparent warning or explanation and ignoring any subsequent attempts to communicate.” (Wikipedia, n.d.)

The email that arrives late in the day shares an experience of unfairness and expresses great urgency. The concerns are acknowledged, including an invitation to have a conversation. No response. You reach out again, this time by phone, leaving a brief message inviting the individual to connect. No response. A final attempt to connect is made, a suitable time lapses, and the file is closed.

Ombuds may be familiar with this scenario: matters brought to the attention of the office, by webform, email, letter, phone or even fax, where after initial contact the individual simply disappears. Unlike situations where someone might ask to withdraw their complaint, perhaps sharing reasons for not wanting to proceed (for example, the issues have been resolved, or I can't or don't want to provide the information you are asking for), abandoned complaints leave staff wondering and asking, what happened? Did we do something wrong? Did we do enough? Perhaps more importantly, what are we supposed to do now?

Abandoned complaints likely comprise only a small percentage of the total number of complaints brought to an ombuds or complaints office (based on the reporting I found online, less than 10%). However, that may still amount to a significant number of complaints, and the issues raised in the complaints may be significant.

This article provides insights into why complaints might be abandoned and an overview of some common practices of ombuds offices in reporting on, and responding to, these types of complaints. I'll share examples from classical ombuds offices, including Patient Ombudsman, an ombuds office with a mandate defined in provincial legislation to review, resolve, and investigate complaints from patients and caregivers about their experiences in the public health care system in Ontario, Canada. I use the word “complaint” and “complainant” because this is how “issues” and “visitors / users” of the service are defined in Patient Ombudsman's legislation, the *Excellent Care for All Act*. Ombuds offices around the world differ in terms of their functions and mandates because of how they are created (do they have terms of reference or guiding legislation?), and their standards of practice (e.g., International Ombuds Association [IOA], Forum of Canadian Ombudsman [FCO], Venice Principles). Patient Ombudsman has a legislated mandate to facilitate resolution and investigate complaints, and the office operates according to the FCO ethical principles of independence, impartiality, fairness, confidentiality and credibility.

In this article, I consider why complainants might abandon their complaint, what an ombuds' responsibilities might be in relation to the substance of the complaint, and what that means for ombuds IRL (in real life). The question of how we continue to advocate for fairness when we have been ghosted is one that should resonate with all ombuds.

WHEN IS A COMPLAINT ABANDONED?

Reporting on abandoned complaints does not appear to be a universal practice for ombuds offices. However, across several publicly available reports and articles, I found consensus that “abandoned” means that a complainant has stopped communicating with the ombuds without providing any reasons, and despite best efforts by staff. In other words, ghosting.

For ombuds offices that do report on this topic, annual reports may refer to these types of complaints as “abandoned” or “discontinued”, or they may be lumped together with other types of closed complaints, most commonly “withdrawn”.



Patient Ombudsman distinguishes between and tracks complaints that come in writing (complaints) and those that come in by phone (enquiries). With respect to enquiries, there are individuals who leave voicemails who staff can never reconnect with, and those who call and are advised to submit a complaint in writing but who don't take this next step. There are also individuals who submit a written complaint who staff are never able to connect with about their concerns, or those who disappear after an initial conversation.

Patient Ombudsman tracks, but does not always publicly report on, "no further contact" complaints, which are a distinct category from "withdrawn complaints". In 2023/2024, out of 2,947 call centre enquiries closed by Patient Ombudsman's early resolution team, 237 (8%) were closed as "no further contact". Out of 1,632 written complaints, 85 (5.2%) were closed with the 'no further contact' by complainant disposition.

Here are examples from some of the publicly available written reports I was able to find for ombuds and complaints offices. I've included the terminology used, as well as the number (and as a percentage) of abandoned complaints.

Table 1:

<p>Patient Ombudsman (ON, CANADA) 2019/2020 & 2020/2021 Annual Report https://patientombudsman.ca/portals/0/documents/patient-ombudsman-annual-report-years-4-and-5-en.pdf</p>	<p>Withdrawn*including complaints where unable to contact complainant (Written Complaints) 62 written (9.1%) in 2019-2020 76 written (6.4%) in 2020-2021</p> <p>"Patient Ombudsman was unable to connect with the complainant after initial contact" (Call Centre Enquiries) 138 calls (7.7%) in 2019-2020 355 calls (14.7%) in 2020-2021</p>
<p>Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada - Office of the Ombudsperson 2021 Report https://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/transparency/member-conduct/Pages/report-member-complaints-2021.aspx#toc33</p>	<p>Abandoned 2 (8.3%) "Abandoned complaints are those where a complaint is filed and acknowledged by the Office of the Ombudsperson, but at some stage of the process, the complainant stops responding to correspondence. They are advised that if they do not state their intentions by a certain date, the matter will be closed"</p>
<p>Durham Ombudsman (ON, CANADA) 2020 Annual Report https://www.durham.ca/en/regional-government/resources/Accountability-and-Transparency/Durham-Ombudsman-Annual-Report-2020.pdf</p>	<p>Abandoned 1 (8.3%) "1 complainant did not wish to proceed" Pending 3 (25%) "...have been advised that we require a Complaint Submission Form to be completed and submitted in order to proceed with their complaints, however, they have yet to submit the completed forms"</p>
<p>McGill University Health Centre Complaints Commissioner (Ombudsman) (QC, CANADA)</p>	<p>Abandoned by user 93 (4%)</p>



<p>2020 Annual Report https://muhc.ca/sites/default/files/MUHC_Ombudsman_Report_2020_ENG_Oct_30_01_WEB.pdf</p>	
<p>UBC Office of the Ombudsperson for Students (BC, CANADA) 2022 Annual Report https://ombudsoffice-2016.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2023/10/2022-Annual-Report-Office-of-the-Ombudsperson-for-Students_Final.pdf</p>	<p>Other “includes no action or abandoned” 19 (2.7%)</p>
<p>Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman (UK) 2022-23 Annual Report https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/sites/default/files/886_PHSO_Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2022-23_FINAL_ONLINE.pdf</p>	<p>Withdrawn or discontinued 380 (1%) “Complaints that have been stopped before a decision was given regarding the issues raised. This may happen when the complainant no longer wishes to pursue the complaint or does not provide the information required to progress an investigation.”</p>
<p>Office of the Ombudsperson and Mediation Services - International Organization for Migration 2022 Annual Report https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/documents/2023-07/oom-2022-annual-report-final.pdf</p>	<p>Abandoned by visitor 67 (17%) “Abandoned: The visitor ceases to be involved in the process without informing OOM.”</p>
<p>The Office of the Independent Police Review Director (OIPRD)(ON) 2014-2015 Annual Report https://www.oiprd.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/OIPRD-AnnualReport-2014-15_E_Small.pdf</p>	<p>Abandoned 82 (5.7%) “Complaints screened out because the complaint form was incomplete, the complaint did not provide the required information, we were unable to contact the complainant or repeated attempts to contact the complainant produced no response”</p>
<p>Anti-discrimination Board of New South Wales (AUS) 2010-2011 Annual Report https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/tp/files/43268/ADBAnnualreport2010-11.pdf</p>	<p>Abandoned 151 (12.5%) “Complaints may be regarded as abandoned if the complainant does not respond to requests for information, or there is no indication they intend to proceed with the complaint, or we lose contact with them.”</p>

WHAT DO OMBUDS DO WHEN COMPLAINANTS DISAPPEAR?

It appears that some ombuds offices will make at least one, or perhaps several, attempts over an extended time frame to connect with individuals who contacted their office, before closing complaint files. However, I was not able to find a lot of public-facing information about the processes ombuds offices employ for responding to abandoned complaints.

Consider the *Complaints Handling Procedures* for the Scottish Police Authority (SPA), which includes details on how to handle withdrawn complaints, as well as complaints where the “complainer fails without good reason to engage with the SPA”. For the latter, the procedures include five elements (Scottish Police Authority, 2023, p. 11):

- Make all reasonable efforts to secure the complainer’s co-operation and engagement
- Ensure accurate record of attempts to contact the complainer
- Advise complainer that will be closing the enquiry as abandoned
- Give complainer 10 working days to respond before closing
- Determine whether to proceed with complaint enquiry to conclusion

What would constitute ‘all reasonable efforts’ in your office?

At Patient Ombudsman, for callers who leave voicemails with new concerns, staff will generally call back two times before closing the enquiry file. When a complaint comes into the office in writing, staff generally reach out three times, using (if provided) more than two modes of communication (e.g., by email and by phone). Notice is provided before closing a written complaint and attempts are tracked in a case management system. Note that as Patient Ombudsman’s legislation does not provide a time limit for bringing complaints, even if a file is closed, a complainant can, at any later date, choose to reconnect with the office and request that review at that time.

WHY ARE COMPLAINTS ABANDONED? WHY WERE WE GHOSTED?

People may decide not to complain for a variety of reasons. In health care settings, there may be reluctance to complain because of feeling disrespected or being unsure about how to make a complaint (Howard, 2019, Findings section). I would add distrust in the institutional or complaints process. The British Columbia Ombudsperson (2020) suggests the following reasons in their *Complaint Handling Guide* (p. 6):

- Not wanting to be a “troublemaker”
- Fear of retribution
- Prior negative experiences with complaining
- Language or cultural issues
- Other individual issues or circumstances.

However, having already made the decision to complain and having brought the complaint to the attention of the ombuds, what might motivate a complainant to then abandon their complaint? Let’s consider seven possible reasons for ghosting in more detail:

1. YOU DON’T CARE ABOUT ME

Why might a complainant disappear after an initial contact? In any relationship, feelings matter. Consider research from the UK Parliamentary and Health Service Ombuds (PHSO) in early 2023 looking at cases that the PHSO had deemed “not ready for us” (i.e., too early / premature for



PHSO's involvement), where the complainant failed to return to the PHSO (around 73% of complainants). Researchers found the "main reason that complainants did not return to [the PHSO] with their complaint was because they thought it would not make a difference" (PHSO, 2023, p. 6). This is a rather disheartening finding, and something that many ombuds might say is profoundly untrue – bringing forward a complaint through the ombuds office can make a difference.

Consider also that an ombuds may be unable to contact someone because the contact information as provided or as entered is incorrect, the individual has moved (or lacks housing), they lack access to technology, or their phone has been disconnected (CHRC, 2014, pp. 17-19). Even though the reason for a lack of contact is unintended, the complainant may feel that they have been abandoned!

2. IT'S TOO HARD TO ENGAGE

This is perhaps the most plausible explanation for ghosting. Relationships take work, but as Ahmed (2021) wrote in her book *Complaint!*: "It is not only that a complaint is not completed by a single action; you often have to keep making the same complaints in different ways" (p. 6). Complaints processes add another layer of difficulty and stress to an already difficult and stressful situation, so it is reasonable that someone might abandon a complaint because it is just too hard. Perhaps they lack the knowledge, resources, or will to continue with the process (Reynolds, 2007). Resources would include having enough time and energy, and the skills or social capital to continue with a complaint.

In a special report, the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC, 2014) provided insights into barriers to accessing justice for Indigenous people which they believed might contribute to high numbers of abandoned complaints (p. 18). Those barriers included language and literacy barriers, lack of support, and complexity of the legal system (including perception that process is complex, difficulty meeting bureaucratic requirements, self-representation). Lack of confidentiality (small communities, power imbalances) and fear of retaliation were also noted as barriers. As noted by one participant at an ombuds conference at Saint Paul University in May 2024, in higher education, there may be (perhaps) more subtle reputational impacts if people find out about the complaint and ask, "why did you complain?" These barriers can make continuing to participate in a complaints process too difficult.

First impressions matter. Ombuds should consider that their processes, requested documentation, methods of communication, or time frames may be factors in whether a complainant decides to continue to engage with the ombuds process. In their annual report the Ombudsman for the L'Autorité des marchés financiers (AMF, 2003) - Mediation Division (the stock market regulator in France) commented on an increasing number of abandoned mediations (30%):

It is to be feared...that a substantial number of abandonments may be due to a feeling of discouragement prompted by the need to assemble a well-documented case file from scattered or missing evidence (p. 9).

The California Student Loan Ombudsman (Department of Financial Protection and Innovation - DFPI) shared in their 2023 annual report that they had found a high percentage of complaints abandoned in the DFPI complaints process. Further investigation revealed that complaints were deemed abandoned by DFPI due to the failure to return required forms – forms that were "confusing and cumbersome" (California, 2023, p. 7) The Ombudsman worked with the department to find alternatives to these forms and therefore reduce the likelihood of complaints being abandoned. Even where an ombuds does not require forms or documentation to initiate the



ombuds process, learning what is required to participate in an organization's formal processes might be a reason that a complainant abandons their complaint.

The PHSO (2023) research also highlighted feedback from complainants about the office's complaint form (too complex / asking for too much or irrelevant info), and one of the suggestions was to be "more aware of complainants' disabilities and proactively offer to make reasonable adjustments (for example, in offering support to complete the complaint form)" (p. 5).

Reflecting on the process at Patient Ombudsman, when complainants call the office, they are often told that they need to submit concerns in written form in order to make it a formal, reviewable complaint under its legislation, and this additional step is no doubt too hard for some complainants. In the 2022-2023 reporting year, Patient Ombudsman (2023) observed that 414 callers were given information about how to make a written complaint to the office, and 180 callers later did so (p. 6). What happened to the other over 56% whose concerns were, at least as described to staff initially, concerns that Patient Ombudsman would be able to review? Why didn't these complainants formalize their complaint in writing? It is perhaps conceivable that a patient may decide to abandon their complaint about their health care experience because engaging in a complaints process is too hard given their current health condition and priorities.

3. IT IS TAKING TOO LONG

Having already lived through the experience that gave rise to the complaint, complainants are understandably looking to have their concerns recognized and addressed as quickly as possible. However, many ombuds offices do not have the resources to make this expectation a reality. Ask an ombuds how long it takes to assign a file or resolve a complaint and the answer is usually, "It depends."

The most common issue that PHSO (2023) found in their survey was that response times were "too slow," and complainants felt they were chasing the PHSO for responses to their questions (p. 4). Waiting any length of time for help might be too long for some complainants, and they may give up. It appears that the government in the United Kingdom was considering a four week, instead of an eight week, wait time for complainants wishing to bring complaints to the Financial Ombudsman, "after finding evidence of consumers abandoning complaints due to the lengthy two-month wait time" (Brennan, 2021, para. 3).

Patient Ombudsman has implemented processes to ensure staff are reaching out to complainants multiple times while they are waiting for their file to be assigned to an early resolution specialist. Yet there are still individuals who staff send multiple emails and leave voicemail messages for, who never respond (and others who only respond after staff send the letter closing their file!).

4. I'M JUST NOT SURE (WHAT TO DO NEXT OR IF I CAN COME BACK)

In some cases, it will be the complainant who will need to take action to move the complaint relationship forward. They may need to provide information, or for ombuds that are an office of last resort, they may need to take some type of action before the office is able to review the concern. In other words, the complaint is "premature." For example, at Patient Ombudsman, a complainant might be referred to the patient relations or patient experience office at a hospital to try and resolve their concerns before Patient Ombudsman can review the complaint. How many complainants, in a heightened complaints state, will confidently recall all of the referrals provided and any steps they need to take to move toward resolution? Do they really understand when it might be appropriate to return to the ombuds for more assistance, for example if their concerns are not addressed by other offices or through other processes?



The PHSO found around a third of complainants did not take any further action after they were advised by the PHSO that it was too early for their complaint to be investigated, and of those that did go back to the organization to try to resolve their complaint directly with the organization, a relatively small percentage (15%) had their concerns addressed, with slightly more (25%) not able to get any response from the organization. Only some complainants returned to the PHSO (PHSO, 2023, p. 3). Complainants with premature complaints told the PHSO they had wanted the PHSO to intervene directly with the organization to ensure there would be a response, or to follow up with them to “see how they are getting on in progressing their complaint” (PHSO, 2023, p. 6). This is why communicating clearly about how an ombuds can help, and when, is critically important.

In addition, one participant at the Saint Paul University conference noted that complainants may be working within an institution where there is a culture of conflict avoidance. That culture may compound a complainant’s uncertainties about participating in the ombuds process, and result in the complaint being abandoned upon more reflection.

5. IT’S NOT YOU (IT WAS ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE)

It is possible that a complainant might bring forward a complaint for motives that may be less about their experience than about wanting to expose or retaliate against an individual, a department, or an institution or organization. In an article about the abandonment of complaints brought to the World Trade Organization (WTO) by one state for the action or inaction of another state, Reynolds (2007) called this retaliatory initiation of a dispute with the WTO a “tit for tat” (p. 15). Ombuds may hear language from complainants that might support such a conclusion, such as, “I just want them to feel what I felt,” (although it is perhaps more common to hear the sentiment, “I never want anyone else to go through what I went through”). If pushed to provide details or engage more fully with a complaints process, these complainants may opt to abandon the complaint. The Autorité des marchés financiers (Financial Markets Authority Ombudsman) in France (2003) noted:

In some cases, it may be assumed that the mere fact of announcing a complaint to the AMF... facilitates a satisfactory resolution. It is also possible that in other situations, once the complainant’s anger cools, he deems his complaint ... inappropriate (p. 9).

Some complainants lack perspective on their own complaints and may not be conscious of underlying motivations for making a complaint. As one participant noted at the Saint Paul University conference, they may have unrealistic expectations of outcomes of the ombuds process. It is usually only after engaging with the ombuds that there may be any acknowledgement or appreciation of the level of merit to the complaint or what is possible to achieve by participating in an ombuds process. In other words, the ombuds is often able to reality-check the complainant about the merits of their complaint, and at that point a complaint might be withdrawn or quietly move to conclusion.

6. COMPLAINT? I’VE MOVED ON

There may be psychological effects underlying ghosting. For example, the phenomenon of recalling interrupted tasks more readily than completed ones (i.e., once the complaint is made, it is no longer top of mind) or the simple act of sharing one’s story out loud, might be reasons why a complainant does not pursue their concerns. As Ahmed (2021) observed in collecting stories for her book, “Not everyone who got in touch with me went on to tell their story. Sometimes getting in touch can be telling enough” (p. 9).

It may be possible that for some complainants, having shared their concern with the ombuds, the complainant no longer needs to be the one to remember the incident - it has passed along



(Freakonomics Radio, 2023). This is a version of the Zeigarnik effect, which is the tendency for our brains to recall interrupted tasks more readily than completed ones - i.e., once the task of making a complaint is complete, the complainant's brain no longer has to remember that task (McMenamin, 2022, Introductory section). In other words, by writing in with a complaint, a complainant may have "wiped [their] memory clear with writing as you might wipe a blackboard clear with a sponge or a wet rag" (Konnikova, 2012, para. 10).

When people call Patient Ombudsman, if the concerns are within jurisdiction of the office and the complaint is not premature (too early for the office to review), the individual may be advised to file a written complaint to initiate the early resolution process, to comply with legislative requirements. They don't always follow through on this suggestion after the call. Perhaps talking about their complaint with someone else is enough, and they lose interest in continuing with the complaint process. Talking something through may be an act of closure, taking away urgency or motivation to finish (Konnikova, 2012, para. 9). So, for the complainant who gets in touch with the office and shares their story, could they literally have set themselves up to forget, and move on from, the experience that had prompted them to contact the office in the first place?

7. IT HAS BEEN RESOLVED

Ombuds may hope that being ghosted means that the complaint has or is being resolved. This is not an unreasonable assumption where the complainant has provided details that they were already taking steps to resolve their concerns. As an example, a patient may call Patient Ombudsman from a hospital emergency room with a complaint about wait times, or a resident might send a letter complaining that a long-term care home's administration hadn't responded to the concerns they talked to them about last week. If Patient Ombudsman staff are unable to reconnect with these individuals, they might reasonably assume that the individual was able to escalate their concerns internally, and possibly they were resolved through these internal processes.

Alternatively, there may be multiple pathways for resolving a complaint or aspects of a complaint, including, for example, legal or regulatory action (i.e., police investigation, civil action, or a human rights tribunal proceeding), and a complainant may have filed complaints concurrently and then have opted to pursue the non-ombuds path.

Realistically however, resolution is likely only a reason for a small percentage of complainants who ghost the ombuds. The PHSO (2023) found that around 15% of those who returned to the organization they had the complaint about after speaking with the PHSO, had their issue resolved by the organization (p.6).

HOW CAN OMBUDS AVOID GHOSTING?

While it may be impossible to eliminate ghosting, drawing from the reasons outlined in this article, ombuds can take steps to try to reduce the number of cases that are deemed to be abandoned:

1. Show that the ombuds cares about complainants & their concerns
2. Make ombuds processes as easy as possible
 - Review intake forms (content; location on website) and identify alternatives to forms
 - Ensure active offers of alternative processes and accommodations – for example, offer to help complete any required forms
 - Share information about what happens if a complaint is withdrawn or abandoned
3. Work to be timely



- Communicate timelines
 - Provide updates
 - Respond to complainant questions
 - Explain delays
4. Be clear about referrals and when to return to the ombuds, if advising the complainant to take initial steps to resolve their concerns
 - Use plain language (e.g., explain what “premature” means)
 - Consider following up in writing with any referrals and next steps
 5. Set expectations about what happens when complaints are brought to the office
 - Make clear what the ombuds can or can’t do – for example, ombuds may not be able to take action without some level of engagement in the complaints process
 6. Ask complainants for updates so they know ombuds want to know if their issue is resolved or they no longer wish to participate in the complaints process

WHAT DO OMBUDS DO ABOUT THE UNDERLYING COMPLAINT?

When a complaint is abandoned, there is the question of what ombuds do about the underlying complaint. Is there any obligation to proceed to review the concerns, notwithstanding the lack of participation by the complainant? What might this look like given the ombuds’ commitment to confidentiality?

While beyond the scope of this paper to engage in a full debate on this topic, I would like to suggest that ombuds have, at a minimum, an obligation to review and reflect on the underlying complaint before closing a file, as well as engage in internal review and reflection – is it possible that the abandonment was the result of our own actions, inactions or processes?

Realistically, not every complaint is actionable (or understandable) on its face, and as ombuds know, there are always two sides to a story, and many times it can be a relief to have one less case to review. In some cases, “Unfortunately, it is impossible to take effective action on behalf of a complainant without a minimum degree of participation on his part” (AMF, 2003, p. 9). However, consider that if a complaint is brought to the Scottish Police Authority (2023), they can continue with an abandoned or withdrawn complaint: “In some cases, further engagement with the complainant may not be necessary in order for the complaint enquiry to proceed to a conclusion” (p. 14).

The Disciplinary and Dispute Resolution Procedures for another non-ombuds complaints body, the Recruitment, Consulting & Staffing Association (RCSA, 2019) Ethics Committee (EC), provides: “9.4 Abandoned complaints can be finalised using whatever information and material is available to RCSA’s EC” (p. 82). The RCSA is an industry body for the recruitment, staffing and workforce solutions industry in Australia and New Zealand.

Here are some questions that ombuds may want to ask:

- Is there a clearly identified element of unfairness (relational, procedural, substantive), that should be examined?
- Is there an identified harm or impact that needs to be addressed?
- How time sensitive is the matter?
- Would further review or investigation “uncover festering issues”? (Forte Workplace Law, 2021, section 1)



- Do the issues identified suggest that there might be violation of the law (e.g., human rights codes, statutory requirements, institutional policy [Forte, 2021, sections 2-4])?
- Is this case part of a trend that the office is observing, or does it point to a systemic issue?
- If the answers provided in response to the above questions suggest that the ombuds should be taking further action on an abandoned complaint, the issue of confidentiality will be relevant, as will whether the complainant can reopen the complaint in the future (do they know whether they can do this?).

In some cases, ombuds may have the complainant's express permission to intervene provided in their initial complaint details. In other cases, where there is an "imminent risk of serious harm," ombuds may intervene notwithstanding the commitment to confidentiality, as outlined in the International Ombuds Association (IOA, 2022) Standards of Practice (section 4.3 & 5.5), or the Association of Canadian College and University Ombudspersons (ACCUO, 2012) Standards of Practice (section 3.2).

As I've shared throughout this article, there are not only different practices in terms of how ombuds respond when visitors disappear, but also in reporting on these files, and whether to continue to advocate for fairness when an ombuds has been ghosted. I hope that I've provided you with some plausible explanations for why your office might be experiencing ghosting, as well as some thoughts based on my research on what you might do to prevent this in the future...or at least feel better about being ghosted!

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