



OMBUDSPERSON
BRITISH COLUMBIA

BUDGET SUBMISSION

2025/26 • 2027/28

Presented to the Select Standing Committee
on Finance and Government Services

April 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. Introduction

An independent officer of the Legislature, the Ombudsperson delivers services under two provincial laws: the 1977 *Ombudsperson Act* (overseeing 1,000 public bodies) and the 2018 *Public Interest Disclosure Act* (protecting 320,000 public sector employees when disclosing wrongdoing). We receive complaints from the public and conduct investigations about unfair decisions or treatment by public bodies and we receive disclosures of wrongdoing by public employees in the province. The Office of the Ombudsperson has a current staff complement of 116.5 full-time employees, plus the Ombudsperson.

Within this staff complement, the Office hosts Corporate Shared Services(CSS) that provide

administrative services to four independent offices. The funding allocated to each of the Ombudsperson operations (investigative support) and the model (shared administrative services) are included for information as Appendix 1.

This budget request is for \$17,796,000 in operating funding for fiscal 2025/26, \$18,756,000 for fiscal 2026/27 and \$19,408,000 in fiscal 2027/28 and a capital budget request of \$215,000 in 2025/26, \$106,000 in 2026/27 and \$100,000 in 2027/28.

A summary of the new budget requests is provided in Table 1, with key requests addressing: (1) inflation, (2) a changing complaint landscape and complainant profile, (3) risk management and continuous improvement, (4) an AI digital fairness initiative, and (5) IT modernization and security.

Table 1 - Summary budget request — New Funding 2025/26 (in \$000s)

	Operating	% Change Operating	Capital
Starting budget per 2025/26 estimates	15,332	-	163
Previously approved through supplemental funding	118	-	-
Adjusted starting budget 2025/26	15,450	-	163
Wage inflation	309	2.00%	-
Non-wage inflation	78	0.50%	-
Total adjusted inflation funding request	15,837	2.50%	163
New key request - Changing complaint landscape and complainant profile	687	4.45%	12
New key request - Risk management and continuous improvement	808	5.23%	10
New key request - AI digital fairness initiative	176	1.14%	4
New key request - IT modernization/security	288	1.86%	26
Total budget including new key requests	17,796	15.18%	215

2. Summary of the supplementary funding request for 2025-26

Inflation funding request

For the 2025/26 fiscal year, the Office of the Ombudsperson is faced with an adjustment of \$309,000 in inflationary cost increases based on the BC Consumer Price Index of 2.6%, which had the following impact (additional details in Appendix 2):

- Wage inflation: net salary adjustments of 2.0% for staffed positions based on predicting increments and wage increases
- Net non-wage inflation of 0.5% increase on non-wage expenditures

New key requests

Changing complaint landscape and complainant profile (\$687,000 operating, \$12,000 capital)

To address a significant shift in the nature and complexity of complaints we receive and complainants seeking our services, which has created new challenges and workload pressures on our core operations. Funding will support us in addressing this complexity while also aiding in enhancing our accessibility to underserved populations across BC, in compliance with recent legislation.

Risk management and continuous improvement (\$808,000 operating, \$10,000 capital)

To ensure our ongoing effectiveness and responsiveness we must invest in our internal infrastructure by focusing on managing organizational risks and making necessary improvements to improve the capacity, agility and efficiency of our operations and service delivery. Funding will support ongoing implementation of a successful continuous improvement pilot as well as one-time consultation and engagement costs

associated with the *Public Interest and Disclosure Act* five-year statutory review mandated in 2025 and our office's review of the *Ombudsperson Act*.

AI digital fairness initiative (\$176,000 operating, \$4,000 capital)

To build our capacity to protect and maintain fairness for British Columbians, ensure accountability of public authorities and promote systemic improvement of public sector administrative processes in an environment where artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly present in both service delivery and administrative decision making by public authorities under our jurisdiction. Funding will help us secure the necessary expertise to examine and investigate AI decisions from both a policy and a technical perspective, and to provide guidance and advice to public authorities at an early stage thus minimizing expensive retrofit costs for those public bodies to deliver services fairly. In this way, we can develop both operational and prevention capacity as AI systems are increasingly adopted by provincial and local public bodies under our jurisdiction.

IT modernization and security enhancements for 4 independent offices of the legislature (Ombudsperson portion \$288,000 operating, \$26,000 capital)

To address critical updates required to our IT infrastructure to avoid erosion of the security of our IT systems, which risks leaving all four independent offices served by CSS with outdated equipment, unsupported applications and technology that detrimentally impacts productivity. Funding will help us modernize identified technology and increase security.

Upon budgetary review, it has been determined that all flexibility within the budget has been exhausted and we are unable to absorb these additional pressures without significant impacts to service delivery and basic operational infrastructure.

Significant changes in fiscal year 2024/25

- In the 2024/25 fiscal year, per the timelines set out in the *Accessible BC Act*, the office has produced a three-year [Accessibility Plan](#) as well as an implementation plan outlining activities required for compliance with the Act.
- The 2024/25 fiscal year marked the final two phases of the seven-phase implementation of the *Public Interest Disclosure Act* announced by government in 2021. In 2024/25, coverage of the Act expanded to cover health agencies, boards and commissions; BC's post-secondary educational sector, including public universities and colleges; and WorkSafe BC.
- Current public sector responses to economic pressures appear to be driving further need and associated complaints, particularly for vulnerable groups, resulting in increased public interactions with our office.

Steps taken to identify efficiencies and savings

- The office has made focused efforts through a pilot continuous improvement initiative in fiscal 2024/25 to identify efficiencies in processes and tools we use to accomplish our core work of intake, investigations, and case management. Ongoing funding of this initiative will result in both more efficient and more effective work. This translates into the ability to handle increasingly complex cases with fewer increases to staffing numbers over time than would be required without implementation.
- As part of our commitment to maximizing our efficiency and controlling costs, we have structured our operational approach so that the successful outcomes of one priority area support the outcomes of other priority areas. While this maximizes efficiency, it also creates interdependence and thus pressure in one area, including failure to adequately fund any one area, also jeopardizes our ability to deliver on other priorities.

3. Key requests

We are acutely aware of the economic challenges facing government and have exercised caution in preparing our requests, reducing work scopes and delaying projects where feasible while ensuring we do not adversely impact service delivery and quality. The focus of our requests is on reducing identified operational risks and increasing efficiencies in our work resulting in long term savings.¹

Performance measurement is an integral component of our operational processes (for more on this, and specific measures, see our [Service Plans](#)). In addition to data gathered from our case management system, for the past three years, we have conducted surveys gathering data and information from the general public, public authority employees, and people who have made complaints to our office to ascertain awareness of, and satisfaction with, our services. In 2025/26 we will take the next step in performance measurement by carrying out our first peer review.

4. Projection of 2024-25 actual spending

The current year budget projection is estimated at \$15,024,634 or just under 99% of the \$15,181,000 budget allocation. We will continue to monitor this until the books are closed and report final numbers at the fall budget presentation to the Committee.

5. STOB analysis of previous year's actuals

The 2023/24 budget expenditures were managed to a 0.06% underspend of the budget. See the templates associated with this package for the specific STOB analysis breakdown.

¹ For details on these requests, see business cases: (1) Changing complaint landscape and complainant profile, (2) Risk management and continuous improvement, (3) AI digital fairness initiative, and (4) IT modernization and security.

APPENDIX I

Operating budget split between Ombudsperson Operations and Corporate Shared Services

STOB	Description	Ombudsperson Operations		
		Fiscal 2024/25 budget	Fiscal 2025/26 budget request	Change
50	Salaries	8,292,000	9,546,000	1,254,000
51	Supplemental Salary	98,000	103,000	5,000
52	Benefits	2,258,000	2,609,000	351,000
54	Officer Salary	324,000	418,000	94,000
55	Boards and Commissions	-	3,000	3,000
57	Travel	97,000	112,000	15,000
60	Professional Serv.	374,000	432,000	58,000
63	Info. Systems	560,000	876,000	316,000
65	Office & Business	307,000	398,000	91,000
67	Info, Adv. & Public's	69,000	71,000	2,000
68	Statutory Public	3,000	4,000	1,000
69	Utilities, Materials	40,000	42,000	2,000
73	Amortization	178,000	186,000	8,000
75	Building Occupancy	1,176,000	1,207,000	31,000
85	Other	-	-	-
	Subtotal	13,776,000	16,007,000	2,231,000
88	Internal Recoveries	-	-	-
90	External Recoveries	(1,000)	(1,000)	-
	Total	13,775,000	16,006,000	2,231,000

	Corporate Shared Services			Total		
	Fiscal 2024/25 budget	Fiscal 2025/26 budget request	Change	Fiscal 2024/25 budget	Fiscal 2025/26 budget request	Change
	2,580,000	2,948,000	368,000	10,872,000	12,494,000	1,622,000
	10,000	12,000	2,000	108,000	115,000	7,000
	657,000	753,000	96,000	2,915,000	3,362,000	447,000
	-	-	-	324,000	418,000	94,000
	-	-	-	-	3,000	3,000
	4,000	5,000	1,000	101,000	117,000	16,000
	10,000	11,000	1,000	384,000	443,000	59,000
	76,000	78,000	2,000	636,000	954,000	318,000
	50,000	52,000	2,000	357,000	450,000	93,000
	-	-	-	69,000	71,000	2,000
	-	-	-	3,000	4,000	1,000
	2,000	3,000	1,000	42,000	45,000	3,000
	-	-	-	178,000	186,000	8,000
	5,000	6,000	1,000	1,181,000	1,213,000	32,000
	-	-	-	-	-	-
	3,394,000	3,868,000	474,000	17,170,000	19,875,000	2,705,000
	(1,837,000)	(2,078,000)	(241,000)	(1,837,000)	(2,078,000)	(241,000)
	-	-	-	(1,000)	(1,000)	-
	1,557,000	1,790,000	233,000	15,332,000	17,796,000	2,464,000

APPENDIX 2

Calculation of wage inflation

We have calculated wage inflation as follows:

- 1. Fiscal 2024/25 cost of living (COL) wage inflation:** The amount used to estimate inflation for 2024/25 was 3% and funding was approved by the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services for this amount. The actual cost of wage inflation for 2024/25 was 3.4% based on the COL increase formula, from the BC Public Service Agency. Thus the request includes the inflation amount of 0.4% not previously funded.
- 2. Fiscal 2025/26 COL wage inflation:** In the fall of 2023, a 2% increase to wage inflation was requested and approved. Taking the COL figures from [BC Stats' February 2025 report](#), 2.6% is applied against the BC Public Service increment formula, the actual inflation rate is 2.8%. The 0.8% anticipated is included in this request.

- 3. Fiscal 2025/26 scheduled wage increases:** This refers to staff who are scheduled to receive an increment based on length of service in their position. This applies to both Schedule A and Management-classified positions. Such an increment ensures that staff will progress within their salary schedule in line with changes made to those schedules (through collective bargaining by the BCGEU and as directed by the Public Sector Employers' Council) and recognizes accumulated knowledge and experience within a role. The mechanics of this were discussed in detail with the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services in the fall of 2023 by the Auditor General. The cost of this increment is equal to 1% of the overall salary budget.





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