



Nfld. & Labrador

Access to information requests overwhelming staff, says privacy commissioner



Donovan Molloy would like to see more automated publishing of information to reduce workload

Geoff Bartlett · CBC News · Posted: Oct 31, 2017 10:56 AM NT | Last Updated: October 31, 2017



Donovan Molloy, Newfoundland and Labrador's privacy commissioner, says government staff have been dealing with a roughly 140 per cent increase in ATIPP requests over the last two years. (Ted Dillon/CBC)

Newfoundland and Labrador's privacy commissioner says government staff are being pushed to their limits with increased workloads processing access to information (ATIPP) requests.

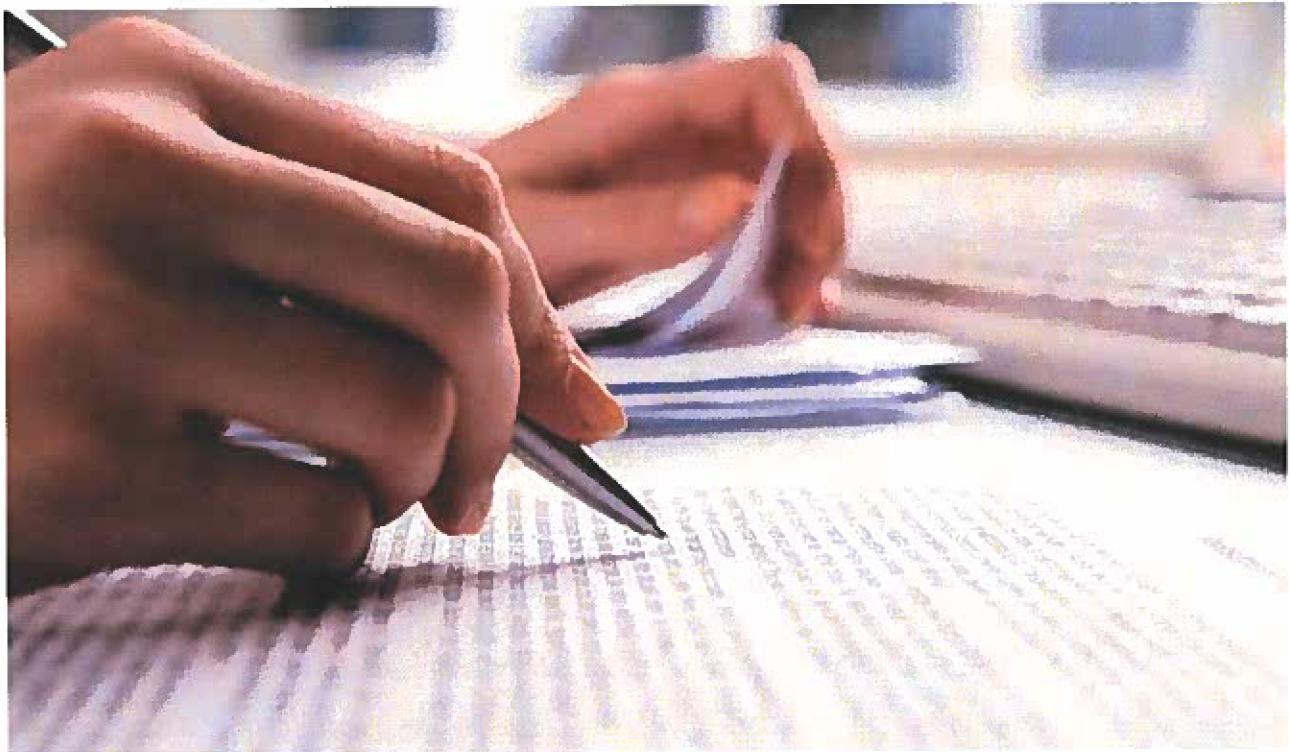
“They are in fact carrying this system on their backs.’

- Donovan Molloy

Donovan Molloy says stress is affecting their mental health and family life.

“If you look over the past three years, we've gone from about 757 requests two years ago to just over 1,400 last year ... to almost 2,100 this year,” he told the *St. John's Morning Show*.

“That's about a 140 per cent increase in workload.”



Government staff who deal with access to information requests in Newfoundland and Labrador are reporting stress, fatigue and mental health issues due to increased workload over the last few years, according to the privacy commissioner.

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Molloy said it's not so much the office of the privacy commissioner itself that is bearing the brunt of the increased work, but staff of public bodies that have to handle all of those ATIPP requests.

In addition to the sheer increase in requests, he said many of them are also more complicated than before, requiring additional consultations and time.

Impacts on staff

All that extra work is spilling over into the personal lives of government staff, Molly said, and he's heard of workers reporting increased stress, fatigue, family breakdowns and mental health issues.

"It's just incredibly moving," he said. "I feel in particular for those people because they are in fact carrying this system on their backs."



Could more government information be automatically published online? That's a question being raised by Donovan Molloy this week. (CBC)

Molloy attributes the spike in ATIPP requests to the debate surrounding [Bill 29](#) five years ago.

"People became more aware of the ability to do access to information," he said. "This time for the first time ever I believe, the number of requests from individual citizens exceeded that of media and political parties."

Calls for more automated publishing

With no increase in staff to meet the greater demand, Molloy said it's time for government to find more efficient ways to let people view public information without having workers go through each individual request.

One way to do that would be to have a procurement system which automatically publishes information, Molloy said.

While some oppose that kind of openness, he thinks it's necessary to prevent staff from burning out.

"I think it can be automated to a degree," he said.

"Imagine going through 10,000 documents, how much time is required. Imagine you've got 10 of those on your desk right now as an ATIPP coordinator. It's pretty daunting."

With files from St. John's Morning Show

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