



Knowing your rights as a Canadian veteran

On April 3, 2007, Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced the creation of the *Veterans Bill of Rights* and veterans' ombudsman to address the needs and concerns of current and former members of the Canadian Forces.

"The language contained in this document reflects the language for which veterans' organizations have long been advocating," says Harper in a speech delivered in Kitchener, Ontario, where the announcement was made. "It is a clear, concise, and straightforward statement that will allow the dedicated people at Veterans Affairs to ensure that every Canadian veteran is treated with the fairness, dignity, and respect to which he or she is entitled."

Bill of Rights

The bill enshrines vital rights for veterans when they deal with Veterans Affairs. Those rights are:

- be treated with respect, dignity, fairness and courtesy;
- take part in discussions that involve veterans and their families;
- have someone with veterans for support when they deal with Veterans Affairs;
- receive clear, easy-to-understand information about Veterans Affairs programs and services, in English or French, as set out in the *Official Languages Act*;
- have their privacy protected as set out in the *Privacy Act*;
- receive benefits and services as set out in Veterans Affairs published service standards and to know their appeal rights.

The bill applies to all Veterans Affairs clients. In return, veterans are being asked to supply correct, complete, and up-to-date information, inform Veterans Affairs as soon as possible of any important changes (such as a change in income or assets).

Ombudsman

Colonel(Ret'd) Patrick B. Stogran was named Canada's first veterans' ombudsman on October 15, 2007. As ombudsman, Col Stogran operates independently of the government while reporting directly to the minister of Veterans Affairs. His responsibilities are to uphold the bill of rights and to review complaints stemming from programs or services, Veterans Affairs or the bill.

Col Stogran is the former associate director general of science and technology operations at Defence Research and Development Canada. He also served as a commanding officer in Afghanistan, served in Bosnia and has a long and distinguished career in the military.

After his appointment, Col Stogran stated he believes, as the ombudsman, his role is “to ensure that anyone who accepts unlimited liability in the service of Canada will not have to face the issues that veterans, past and present, had to in collecting on the government’s obligation to them.”

The ombudsman office can be reached at 1-877-330-4343, or through the website at www.ombudsman-veterans.gc.ca.

For more information on the *Veterans Bill of Rights* please contact 1-866-522-2122 (English) or 1-866-522-2022 (French) or visit www.vac-acc.gc.ca.