
Submitting a petition to the House of Commons

INFORMATION AND GUIDELINES

January 7, 2010

General Information

Only a Member of Parliament (MP) can present a petition to the House of Commons. You must send your petition to an MP or meet with him/her personally (the recommended approach), with a request to present the petition in the House.

You can ask any MP to present the petition, even if he/she does not represent your riding. MPs are often in their home ridings on Friday to take care of constituency work, so that's a good day to request an appointment. A personal meeting provides an opportunity for you to educate the MP about the issue and to enlist his/her support.

Nothing in the rules or practices of the House of Commons requires an MP to present a petition he/she has received, so make sure the MP will submit the petition before leaving it -- you don't want your hard work gathering dust in a file somewhere. The MP does not have to agree with the petition in order to present it in the House.

An MP may present a petition to the House of Commons in either of two ways: by making a brief statement in the House regarding the origin and subject of the petition (the best idea), or by filing the petition with the Clerk of the House while the House is sitting.

If an MP makes a statement in the House when presenting a petition, the statement is reproduced in Hansard, the official record of the House debates. Hansard can be accessed on line through the House of Commons web site (search "House of Commons Canada Hansard"), and is available the following day. A record of each petition presented, whether or not a statement is made in the House, appears in the Journals for that day.

Once the petition has been presented, it is sent to the Government, which must table a response in the House of Commons within 45 days, so follow up on that with the MP who presented it.

Form and Content of Petitions - Guidelines

There are strict rules for petitioning Parliament -- no submitting petitions written on a paper napkin, your phone bill or some other clever idea -- so please read the instructions provided by the government (search "House of Commons Canada petitions" for complete instructions). The information below is excerpted from their guidelines.

Introduction

Before a petition can be presented by an MP, it must be examined to confirm that it meets certain requirements established by the rules and practices of the House of Commons (described below). An MP wishing to present a petition must first submit the petition to the Clerk of Petitions for certification.

Form of a Petition - Addressee

A petition must be addressed to one of the following:

- the House of Commons
- the House of Commons in Parliament assembled
- the Government of Canada
- a Minister of the Crown, or
- a Member of the House of Commons

Text

A petition must contain a request, sometimes also referred to as a "prayer", for the addressee to take some action (or refrain from taking some action) to remedy a grievance. A petition may also include a more detailed description of the grievance and/or a statement of opinion. However, a statement of grievance or opinion alone cannot be received as a petition.

The request should be clear and to the point. The petition must not demand or insist that the addressee do something. The petition may include a return address.

Written, Typewritten or Printed on Paper of Usual Size

The text of a petition must be handwritten, typed, printed or photocopied on sheets of paper of usual size, i.e. measuring 21.5 cm x 28 cm (8 1/2 x 11 inches) or 21.5 cm x 35.5 cm (8 1/2 x 14 inches). A petition submitted on paper of irregular size, or on any other material, is not acceptable.

Language

A petition must be respectful, use temperate language, and not contain improper, disrespectful or unparliamentary language. In particular, there should be no disrespect shown to the Sovereign or charge made against the character or conduct of Parliament, the courts or any other duly constituted authority. A petition must be written in one or both of the official languages.

Erasures or Interlineations

The text of a petition must not be altered either by erasing or crossing out words or by adding words or commentary. Any alteration will make the petition unacceptable.

Attachments, Appendices or Extraneous Material

A petition must be free of any other matter attached or appended to or written or printed on the petition, whether in the form of additional documents, maps, pictures, logos, news articles, explanatory or supporting statements, or requests for support. A petition printed on the reverse of a document (for example a newsletter) is not acceptable.

Matters Within Federal Jurisdiction

A petition must concern a subject within the authority of the Parliament of Canada, the House of Commons or the Government of Canada. A petition must not concern a purely provincial or municipal matter or any matter which should be brought before a court of law or a tribunal. The *Criminal Code* falls within federal jurisdiction.

Subject-Matter Indicated on Every Sheet

If a petition is composed of more than one sheet of signatures and addresses, the subject-matter of the petition must be indicated on every sheet.

Signatures and Addresses

A petition must contain a minimum of 25 valid signatures with addresses.

A petition should contain signatures of residents of Canada only. Persons not resident in Canada cannot petition the House of Commons of Canada. A petition signed exclusively by non-resident persons is not acceptable.

There is no minimum age requirement for anyone signing a petition.

Each petitioner must sign, **not print**, his or her own name directly on the petition and must not sign for anyone else. If a petitioner cannot sign because of illness or a disability, this must be noted on the petition and the note signed by a witness.

A petition must contain original signatures written directly on the document and not pasted, taped, photocopied or otherwise transferred to it.

Some signatures and addresses must appear on the first sheet with the text of the petition. Signatures and addresses may appear on the reverse of the petition.

The address may either be the petitioner's full home address, or the city and province, or the province and postal code. As with the signature, the address must be written directly on the document and not pasted, taped, photocopied or otherwise transferred to it. The inclusion of other contact information (such as telephone numbers or email addresses) is permitted but not required.

A Member of the House of Commons may sign a petition, but should ask another Member to present that petition. The signatures of Members inscribed on a petition are not counted towards the required 25 signatures and addresses.

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