



ELECTRONIC PETITIONS – GUIDE FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ("SPONSORS") HOUSE OF COMMONS • CANADA

What is a Petition?

A petition is used to draw attention to an issue of public interest or concern and to request that the House of Commons, the Government of Canada, a Minister of the Crown, or a Member of the House of Commons take some action.

Petitioners cannot directly present a petition in the House of Commons; only a Member of Parliament is able to do so. In order for a petition to be posted on the House of Commons e-petitions website and eventually presented in the House, it must be sponsored by a Member.

A petition must meet certain requirements established by the rules and practices of the House. The Clerk of Petitions holds the authority to certify that these requirements have been met.

This guide focuses on the process of presenting e-petitions from the point of view of Members of Parliament who serve as **sponsors**. Members of the public who wish to create or sign a petition should consult the guides entitled *Electronic Petitions – Guide to Creating and Submitting a Petition*; *Electronic Petitions – Guide for Supporters*; or *Electronic Petitions – Guide for Signatories*.

Confidentiality

Members of Parliament are responsible for safeguarding the privacy of petitioners by treating as strictly confidential all personal information that may be submitted to them or that may otherwise come to their attention during the e-petitions process.

Sponsoring E-Petitions

- A person who submits a petition (**petitioner**) on the e-petitions website must designate a Member of Parliament whom he or she wishes to invite to serve as the **sponsor**.
- After a petitioner secures the electronic support of at least five other people (**supporters**), an e-mail is sent to a designated Member of Parliament requesting that he or she sponsor the petition. Members may accept or refuse this request.
- In accepting to sponsor a petition, a Member is not necessarily agreeing with the opinions or request set out in the petition.
- To sponsor the petition, a Member must click on the link in the e-mail, or access "Pending Requests" in the "Sponsor" section of their MP Portal, located on the e-petitions website, and follow the prompts in order to accept. Alternatively, a Member can decide to decline the request.
- If a Member does not click on the link, the request will expire after 30 days and the system will automatically prompt the petitioner to select another Member as a potential sponsor.
- Once a Member agrees to sponsor a petition, this acceptance cannot be withdrawn. The name and riding of the Member will appear online in conjunction with the petition. Since parliamentary privilege does not apply to the text of a petition prior to its presentation in the House, it is very important for Members to ascertain that there is nothing in the text of the petition that is inappropriate or impertinent. Members may wish to review **Appendix A "Form and Content of Petitions"** for additional information about the requirements for petitions.

- Once a Member agrees to sponsor a petition, it is examined by the Clerk of Petitions to ensure that it is procedurally acceptable; generally this is completed within three to five working days. If the petition meets the set requirements, it is translated and published on the website for signature by the general public for a period of 120 days. The Member, petitioner and supporters are notified by email when the petition is published.
- If the text is not approved, the sponsoring Member, as well as the petitioner, will be notified by the Clerk of Petitions. Petitioners may decide at that point to amend the text of their e-petition, but the creation and submission process has to start anew.
- There is no limit as to the number of petitions that a Member may sponsor, though any given e-petitioner may only have one e-petition open for signature at any one time.
- A Member of Parliament may sign an e-petition, but may not sponsor or present an e-petition that he or she has signed, nor is a Member's signature counted toward the minimum number of signatures necessary for presentation in the House. Furthermore, a Member may not sign an e-petition using an e-mail address or a device with an IP address associated with the Parliament of Canada or the Government of Canada.

Delegation of Authority

Members of Parliament may delegate their authority for approving or refusing requests to sponsor petitions. Any employee to whom this authority is delegated must ensure that petitioners' personal information is not lost, left in a non-secure environment, or used for purposes other than those related to the petitioning process. The Member of Parliament is still ultimately responsible for personal data protection if they choose to delegate authority. Delegation of this authority remains valid for the duration of a Parliament (until dissolution) and may be modified at any time by an MP.

Certification and Endorsement

- Once the 120-day deadline for signing a petition has closed and if the petition has garnered at least 500 valid signatures, the Clerk of Petitions will issue a **certificate** which includes the text of the petition and the total number of signatures. The certificate is sent to the sponsoring Member.
- If a petition does not meet the requirements for certification, an explanation will be provided to the sponsoring Member.
- Any Member presenting an e-petition must **endorse** it by signing the back of the certificate. The endorsement serves to identify the Member presenting the petition, in part because he or she is responsible for any improprieties the petition may contain, as well as to demonstrate that the Member consents to present the petition.

Presenting E-petitions

A Member who has sponsored an e-petition will normally present it in the House as well, but is not obliged to and may ask another colleague to do so. A Member may be asked to present a petition even if he or she does not represent the petitioner's electoral district.

There are two options available to Members for presenting petitions:

1) Presentation in the House ("front door")

- Members may present certified e-petitions in the House on any sitting day during Routine Proceedings when the Speaker calls the rubric "Presenting Petitions". A maximum of 15 minutes each sitting day is set aside for the presentation of petitions. Routine Proceedings takes place at 3:00 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays, at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and at 12:00 noon on Fridays.

- To be recognized to present a petition, a Member must be in his or her assigned place. A Member with more than one petition to present on a given day is advised to present them all when given the floor, as individual Members are recognized by the Chair only once during “Presenting Petitions”.
- No debate is permitted when a Member presents a petition. A Member may make a brief factual statement (e.g., referring to the petition being duly certified, to its source, to the subject matter of the petition and its request, and to the number of signatures it carries), but Members are not allowed to read petitions nor are they to indicate their agreement or disagreement with them. An entry for the petition appears in the *Journals* for that day together with a hyperlink to the original e-petition.

2) Filing with the Clerk of the House (“back door”)

- A certified petition may also be presented by a Member at any time during a sitting of the House by filing it with a Clerk at the Table in the Chamber. An entry for the petition appears in the *Journals* for that day together with a hyperlink to the original e-petition.

Government Responses to Petitions

- The *Standing Orders of the House of Commons* require the government to respond within 45 calendar days to every petition presented to the House.
- Once the government’s response is tabled in the House, it becomes a sessional paper and is recorded in the *Journals*, and is added to the e-petitions website. A copy is sent to the sponsoring Member, as well as the petitioner, the supporters, and the signatories.
- In the event that the government fails to respond to a petition within 45 calendar days, the matter of the government’s failure to respond is automatically referred to the standing committee designated by the Member who presented the petition. Within five sitting days of such a referral, the Chair of the committee must convene a meeting to consider the matter.

Prorogation and Dissolution

- During **prorogation**, Members may continue to sponsor petitions as petitioners may continue to submit petitions. However, petitions may not be presented in the House until the opening of the new session. Any outstanding government responses to petitions presented in the previous session must be tabled in the new session.
- The **dissolution** of Parliament, on the other hand, terminates the e-petitioning process. New petitions cannot be submitted until the date set for the return of the writs. Any e-petition that has not been presented to the House before dissolution, including those that have been certified, must be started anew in the next Parliament. As signatures may not be reused, signatories who wish to support the petition will have to sign the new one. The government’s obligation to respond to a petition likewise ends at dissolution.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT SPONSORING A PETITION

- Members of Parliament and their staff are encouraged to contact petitioners who have sought their help as sponsors in order to confirm their identity, and to offer information about subsequent steps to follow.
- Members of Parliament may delegate their authority concerning requests to sponsor e-petitions to people on their staff. We encourage Members to ensure that delegates understand their obligation to protect the confidentiality of personal information provided by petitioners and signatories during the e-petitions process.

Appendix A

Form and Content of Petitions – Guidelines

Addressee

A petition must be addressed to one of the following:

- “the House of Commons” or “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

The text of an e-petition must be no more than 250 words. It must contain a request, also called a “prayer”, that the addressee take or to avoid some concrete action in order to remedy a grievance.

A petition may also include a more detailed description of the grievance, or a statement of opinion, but these alone cannot be received as a petition; a concrete, specific request must be included, and the request must be clear and to the point, and phrased as a request, not as a demand.

The text of an e-petition may not include a URL or any other link or web-based reference. Any petition that does include such links will be rejected.

Language

A petition must be respectful, use temperate language, and not contain improper or unparliamentary language. In particular, it should not contain disrespectful or offensive language with respect to the Crown, Parliament, or the courts. It may not include charges made against the character or conduct of Parliament, the courts, or any other duly-constituted authority. An e-petition must be written in either English or French.

Subject of the Petition

Federal jurisdiction

A petition must concern a subject that is 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.

Sub judice

A petition may not concern a matter that is *sub judice*, i.e. a matter that is the subject of legal proceedings or currently before the courts.

Similar petitions

Two e-petitions that are substantially the same may not be open for signature at the same time. An e-petitioner whose e-petition is substantially the same as another may wait for the first e-petition to close, or may amend his or her e-petition so as to make it distinctive.

Signatures and Addresses

An e-petition must have garnered a minimum of 500 valid signatures to be presented to the House. The signatures of non-citizens who are not resident in Canada, and who therefore cannot petition the House of Commons, are not counted.

There is no minimum age requirement to sign a petition.

The signatory must provide his or her:

- name;
- unique e-mail address (i.e. an e-mail address may only be associated with one signatory);

- country and, if within Canada, province or territory and postal code; and
- telephone number.

For further information:

Clerk of Petitions

Room 131-N, Centre Block

House of Commons

Tel: 613-992-9511

Fax: 613-947-7626

E-mail : pmb-aed@parl.gc.ca

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