



ELECTRONIC PETITIONS – GUIDE TO CREATING AND SUBMITTING A PETITION

HOUSE OF COMMONS • CANADA

Every petition begins as an idea and progresses through several stages on its way to being signed and presented in the House of Commons for response from the government. If you have an idea for a petition on a matter that is important to you, this guide will help you to get started and to navigate the process for submitting an electronic petition.

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. A person preparing and submitting such a request is known as a **petitioner**.

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

A petition must also meet certain requirements established by the rules and practices of the House. The Clerk of Petitions, a non-partisan House of Commons employee, holds the authority to certify that these requirements have been met.

This guide focuses on the process for creating and submitting **electronic petitions** (“**e-petitions**”) by members of the public. For paper petitions, see the guide entitled *Paper Petitions – Guide for the Public*.

Creating an Account

Note: A petitioner may only have one e-petition open for signature in his or her name at any one time.

The first step towards creating an e-petition is to create an account on the e-petitions website.

In addition to providing a valid e-mail address and choosing a password, a **petitioner** must provide the following contact information:

- name;
- city;
- country and province or territory;
- postal code; and
- telephone number.

You may not use an e-mail address or a device with an IP address associated with the Government of Canada or the Parliament of Canada to create an account.

You must also certify that you are either a Canadian citizen or a resident of Canada, and must agree to the *Terms of Use*. The *Terms of Use* include detailed information about your rights and responsibilities with respect to the e-petitions process and should be read very attentively. A copy of all *Terms of Use* is available for reference in the “About” section of the e-petitions website.

Once your contact information has been submitted, a message with an embedded hyperlink will automatically be sent to your e-mail address, prompting you to confirm the creation of your account.

Creating a Petition – Format and Content

Now that you have created an account, you may begin to draft a petition. A standardized template to assist you in your drafting is provided on the website; see also **Appendix A “Sample Format for an Electronic Petition”** below. Please note the following guidelines for composing the text of a petition:

Addressee

The 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

When creating a new petition, you will need to compose a text of no more than 250 words that identifies whom it is that you are addressing, and the specific request you are making of them, also called a “prayer,” to take or to avoid some concrete action in order to remedy a grievance.

The 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. The request must be clear and to the point, and phrased as a request and not as a demand.

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

Language

The 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. The e-petition must be written in either English or French.

Subject of the Petition

Federal jurisdiction

The 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

The 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. A search function is available on the website in order to identify existing e-petitions.

Steps to Have an E-petition Published

Before you begin collecting signatures from the general public, the three steps listed below must be completed. You will receive an e-mail advising you when the petition progresses through each step.

1. Identify Supporters

- When you draft your petition, you will be prompted to identify at least five potential supporters, but no more than ten, and provide their e-mail addresses.
- A **supporter** is a resident of Canada or a citizen of Canada living either in Canada or abroad, who supports the ideas and proposals set out in your petition and who signifies his or her support before it is sent to an MP to be sponsored.
- A supporter may be a friend, colleague, neighbour, or any eligible person who is willing to sign your petition.
- An e-mail address associated with the Government of Canada or the Parliament of Canada may not be provided as contact information for supporters.
- The first five supporters to back your petition will be automatically added as **signatories** to the petition if and when it is posted for signature online. They will receive e-mail updates concerning the petition's progress through the various stages. The agreement of five supporters is required before you can proceed to step 2.

2. Invite a Member of Parliament to Sponsor the Petition

- During the process of creating your e-petition, you will need to select a **sponsor**. A **sponsor** is an MP who agrees to assist the petitioner in seeing the petition through the various steps in the e-petition process.
- The sponsor need not be the MP who represents the petitioners' or signatories' constituencies in the House of Commons.
- Once your petition is sent to a prospective sponsor for consideration, the MP will have 30 days to make a decision. If the prospective sponsor has not responded within 30 days or if the MP refuses the request, you will be prompted to invite another MP to carry out this role. You will have a total of five such opportunities, if necessary.
- The MP whom you identify as a potential sponsor, or his or her delegate, will be provided with your contact information and may contact you by email or by telephone to exchange some thoughts before responding to your request. **In accepting to sponsor a petition, a Member is not necessarily agreeing with the opinions or request set out in the petition.**
- In the event a sponsoring MP ceases to be a Member before an e-petition is published on the website, the Clerk of Petitions will contact the petitioner and invite him or her to select another Member to act as sponsor.
- A sponsoring Member is not permitted to rescind his or her decision to act as a sponsor.

3. Examination by Clerk of Petitions

- Once an MP has agreed to sponsor your petition, it will be examined by the Clerk of Petitions to ensure that its form and content respect the rules and practices of the House. This includes validating your signature and those of the supporters.
- If the petition meets the requirements, it will be translated and published on the e-petitions website for signature by the general public. This step will be done on a first-come, first-served basis and will generally be completed within three to five working days from when the petition is sponsored.
- If the text does not meet the set requirements, the Clerk of Petitions will contact the petitioner via e-mail, explaining the grounds for rejection. A copy of this e-mail will also be sent to the five supporters and to the sponsoring MP. The petitioner may then decide to amend the text of his or her petition, but the submission process has to start anew.

Petition Available to be Signed by the Public

Once the petition has been published on the e-petitions website, it is available to be signed by the public. The “signature” consists of providing one’s name and some basic contact information. The Clerk of Petitions has the right to reject any signatures of which the validity is in doubt. Please note the following with regard to signatures:

- Signatures of non-citizens who are not resident in Canada are not counted.
- There is no minimum age requirement to sign a petition.
- The information supplied must include the signatory’s:
 - name;
 - unique e-mail address (an e-mail address may only be associated with one signatory);
 - country and, if within Canada, postal code and province or territory; and
 - telephone number.

An e-petition will remain open for signatures for **120 days**. To receive final certification, an e-petition must receive a minimum of **500 valid signatures** during this period. If an e-petition has not garnered the minimum number of signatures by then, it will proceed no further, but will remain visible online.

In the event a petition is published and open for signature and the sponsor ceases to be a Member, you will be invited to select a new sponsor, but this is not a requirement.

Certification and Presentation of a Petition

Once the deadline for signing a petition has closed, the Clerk of Petitions will proceed with a final validation of signatures and will issue a certificate that includes the text of the petition and the total number of signatures, provided that at least 500 valid signatures are present. This certificate will be forwarded to the sponsoring MP and it can then be presented either by the sponsor or by another MP in the House. A record of this presentation will appear in the *Journals* for that day and you, the supporters and the signatories of the petition will be advised by e-mail.

Government Responses to Petitions

The *Standing Orders* (the rules governing the House of Commons) require the government to respond within 45 calendar days to every petition presented in the House of Commons.

You, the supporters, the signatories, and the sponsor will be notified by e-mail when the response is tabled in the House. A copy will also be found on the e-petition website along with the original petition.

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 MP 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

At **prorogation** (the period of time between two sessions of a Parliament), the e-petitions website remains active and petitioners may continue to submit petitions and gather signatures. However, certified petitions may not be presented in the House until the opening of the new session, and any outstanding government responses to petitions presented in the previous session must be tabled in the new session.

The **dissolution** of Parliament (the end of a Parliament triggering a general election), 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 but not yet presented, must be started anew in the next Parliament. Any signatures gathered up to that point may not be reused; signatories who wish to support the new petition will have to sign again. The government's obligation to respond to a petition likewise ends at dissolution.

Data Management

Basic information collected from **petitioners** (name, city, province or territory, and country) is permanently published along with the text of each e-petition on the website. Other contact information (e-mail address and phone number) is shared with potential MP sponsors identified by petitioners when they create and submit an e-petition and with the Clerk of Petitions for the purpose of validating the petitioner's identity. In the event that a petition becomes the subject of a committee proceeding, the Clerk of Petitions may share the petitioner's contact information with the clerk of the relevant committee, should the committee wish to invite the petitioner to appear before it.

Personal information regarding **supporters** and **signatories** collected through the e-petition website, will be destroyed at regular intervals and only made available to the House of Commons Administration for the purposes set out in the *Terms of Use*.

Use of Cookies

The House of Commons uses cookies, a feature offered by web browsers, to collect anonymous data and track the browsing habits of users who visit its website. More specifically, when a user visits the e-petition web page and wants to create a user account or to initiate, support, or sign an electronic petition, the website automatically recognizes the domain name, IP address, web browser version, operating system, and other relevant data about the user's computer and the site the user visited that linked to our site.

Most browsers are configured to use cookies as a default setting. Users can reconfigure their browser options to block cookies, or to receive a notification when cookies are used. However, users who have chosen to disable cookies will not have access to some features of our website.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR PETITIONERS

- You are strongly encouraged to contact potential supporters and a potential MP sponsor beforehand to determine that they are likely to accept an invitation to support or sponsor it. While you need a minimum of five supporters to start off with, it is a good idea to provide the names of more than five potential supporters in case one or more of them declines or fails to respond.
- Whether the MP accepts or rejects your invitation to serve as sponsor, he or she may have suggestions to make to you concerning the form or content of your petition. This guidance should be taken seriously, since defects as to form and content may lead to your petition being rejected.

Appendix A

Sample Format for an Electronic Petition

“PETITION TO THE

*[A petition must be addressed to one of the following - **select one:**]*

- House of Commons
- House of Commons in Parliament assembled
- Government of Canada
- Minister of *[name of ministry]*
- Member of Parliament *[name of Member of Parliament]*

WHEREAS

*[This section is optional: you may here state facts or opinions (known as grievances) supporting your request. A petition may include many grievances, but keep in mind that **it may not contain more than 250 words.**]*

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED,

[Here you may identify, in general terms, who the petitioners are. For example: “We the undersigned citizens (or residents) of Canada”; “electors of (name of electoral district)”; “residents of the Province of (name)”; “residents of the City (or Village, etc.) of (name)”.]

CALL UPON THE

*[Indicate whom you would like to take action on your request. It is usually the same addressee as above, but it may be different – **select one:**]*

- House of Commons
- House of Commons in Parliament assembled
- Government of Canada
- Minister of *[name of ministry]*
- Member of Parliament *[name of Member of Parliament]*

TO

[Set out the request by stating succinctly what action the petitioners wish the addressee to take or what action it should refrain from taking.]”

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

November 2015