



# **PAPER PETITIONS – GUIDE FOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT**

## **HOUSE OF COMMONS • CANADA**

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**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. This guide will help you assist any Canadian citizen or Canadian resident wishing to prepare a paper petition and present it in the House.**

### **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 or refrain from some action.

Petitioners cannot directly present a petition to the House of Commons; only a Member of Parliament is able to do so.

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

This guide focuses on the process for presenting paper petitions, from the point of view of Members of Parliament. Members of the public may wish to consult the guide entitled *Paper Petitions – Guide for the Public*. For electronic petitions, Members should refer to the guide entitled *Electronic Petitions – Guide for Members of Parliament (“Sponsors”)*.

### **Presenting Paper Petitions**

Any Member of Parliament may be asked to present a paper petition even if he or she does not represent the petitioner’s electoral district, but a Member is not required to present a petition he or she has received. The Member may choose not to present it, or to ask another Member to present the petition.

### **Certification**

Once a paper petition has been signed and sent to the Member who intends to present it, the Member must send it to the Clerk of Petitions (Room 131-N, Centre Block) to certify that it is acceptable (see below for more information concerning the requirements as to form and content). The Member submitting the petition should clearly indicate his or her own name.

Certification normally takes between three and five working days, though this may vary depending on the volume of petitions being submitted for certification.

Petitions may be submitted for certification during periods of adjournment or prorogation. However, petitions cannot be certified during a dissolution (election period).

A petition meeting the requirements for certification will be returned to the Member with a certificate attached, signed by the Clerk of Petitions. A certified petition is not to be altered or tampered with in any way, nor is the certificate to be removed.

### **Uncertifiable Paper Petitions**

A petition submitted for certification which does not meet the requirements as to form and content will be returned to the Member with an explanation.

## **Presentation During Routine Proceedings**

From his or her assigned seat, a Member may present a certified petition in the House on any sitting day during Routine Proceedings when the Speaker calls “Presenting Petitions”. A maximum of 15 minutes each sitting day is provided for the presentation of petitions.

Routine Proceedings takes place at 3:00 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:00 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays and at 12:00 noon on Fridays.

A Member presenting a petition must endorse it by signing the back of the last page of the petition. 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.

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”. This allows more Members to be recognized within the 15-minute time limit.

No debate is permitted when a Member presents a petition. A Member may make a brief factual statement (referring, for example, to the petition being duly certified, to its source, to the subject matter of the petition and its request, and the number of signatures it carries), but Members are not to read petitions nor are they normally to indicate their agreement or disagreement with it. Any remarks they make when presenting a petition will be recorded in the *Debates*, and an entry for the petition appears in the *Journals* for that day.

Members are advised to keep a photocopy of at least the first page of a petition for future reference. A Member wishing a photocopy of a petition already presented in the House should contact the Office of Parliamentary Returns of the Privy Council (tel. 613-943-5040; fax 613-943-5051).

## **Presentation by Filing with the Clerk of the House**

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, once it has been endorsed by the Member. A record of the petition appears in the *Journals* for that day.

## **Government Responses to Petitions**

The Standing Orders require the government to respond within 45 calendar days to every petition submitted to it. The original petition is forwarded to the Office of Parliamentary Returns of the Privy Council Office, which makes arrangements with the appropriate government department or agency for the preparation of a reply.

Each petition receives an individual government response. Any Member who has presented a petition is provided with a copy of the response shortly after it is tabled. After being tabled in the House, a government response to a petition becomes a sessional paper and is recorded in the *Journals*.

If the tabling of a government response to a petition is done during Routine Proceedings, the government spokesperson, usually the Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader, simply informs the House that responses to a certain number of petitions are being tabled; no reference is made to specific petitions or to the content of the responses. The government response to a petition may also be deposited with the Clerk.

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 a standing committee designated by the Member presenting the petition. Within five sitting days of such a referral, the Chair of the committee must convene a meeting to consider the matter.

At prorogation, any outstanding government responses to petitions presented in the previous session must be tabled in the subsequent session. On the other hand, the dissolution of Parliament (the end of a Parliament triggering a general election) ends any requirement for the government to respond to a petition.

## Creating a Paper Petition — Form and Content

A suggested template for paper petitions to the House of Commons that satisfy the requirements below is set out at the end of this guide (see **Appendix A — Sample Template of an Acceptable Petition**).

### 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 a petition is essentially 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 include a 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.

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

### Subject of a 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.* currently before the courts.

### 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. A petition must be written in either English or French.

### Written, Typewritten or Printed on Paper of Usual Size

The text of a paper petition must be handwritten, typed, printed or photocopied on sheets of paper of usual size, *i.e.* measuring 21.5 cm x 28 cm (8.5 x 11 inches) or 21.5 cm x 35.5 cm (8.5 x 14 inches). A petition submitted on paper of irregular size, or on any other material, is not acceptable.

### 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, *e.g.* additional documents, maps, pictures, logos, news articles, explanatory or supporting statements, or requests for support. A petition printed on the reverse of another document is not acceptable.

### Signatures and Addresses

A paper petition must contain a minimum of 25 valid signatures with addresses. The signatures of non-citizens who are not resident in Canada and who therefore cannot petition the House of Commons are

not counted. If you anticipate that your petition will circulate outside of Canada, please make sure that your signatories are aware that they may only sign if they are either residents of Canada or citizens residing abroad.

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

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

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.

At least three signatures with addresses must appear on the very first sheet with the text of the petition. Signatures and addresses may appear on the reverse sides of pages.

The address may consist of **at least one** of the following:

- the signatory's **full home address**; or
- the signatory's **city and province**; or
- the signatory's **province and postal code**.

As with the signature, the address must be written directly on the document. Additional contact information (such as telephone numbers or e-mail addresses) is not required.

A Member of the House of Commons may sign a petition, but in that case he or she must ask another Member to present that petition in the House. The signatures of Members are not counted towards the required minimum of 25 signatures.

## **Draft Petitions**

Petitioners sometimes submit a draft of their petition (without signatures) to a Member of Parliament to see whether it is correctly worded and to see whether the Member will agree to present it. The Clerk of Petitions is available to support Members with this task.

### **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](mailto:pmb-aed@parl.gc.ca)

*November 2015*

## Appendix A – Sample Template of an Acceptable Petition

### *First page of the petition*

**PETITION TO**

*Select one:* the House of Commons, the House of Commons in Parliament assembled, the Government of Canada, (name of a Minister of the Crown), *or* (name of a Member of Parliament)

**We, the undersigned**

*Here identify the petitioners in general terms. For example:*  
- citizens (or residents) of Canada  
- electors of (name of electoral district)  
- residents of the Province of ...  
- residents of the City (or Village, or Township, etc.) of ...

***This section, the "grievance", is optional:***

**draw the attention of**

*Select one:* the House of Commons, the House of Commons in Parliament assembled, the Government of Canada, (name of a Minister of the Crown), *or* (name of a Member of Parliament)

**to the following:**

*Here state briefly the reasons underlying your request by summarizing the facts which you wish the addressee to consider. It is customary, though not obligatory, for each statement of fact in this section to begin with the word "Whereas".*

**THAT**

**THEREFORE, your petitioners**

**request or call upon**

*Select one:* the House of Commons, the House of Commons in Parliament assembled, the Government of Canada, (name of a Minister of the Crown), *or* (name of a Member of Parliament)

**to**

*Here set out the request by stating succinctly what action you wish the addressee to take or refrain from taking.*

**Signatures**

*(Sign your own name. Do not print.)*

**Addresses**

*(Full home address, **or** city and province, **or** province and postal code.)*

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***Subsequent pages of the petition***

**Your petitioners**

*Here repeat the request from the first page of the petition.*

**Signatures**

*(Sign your own name. Do not print.)*

**Addresses**

*(Full home address, **or** city and province, **or** province and postal code.)*

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