



PAPER PETITIONS – GUIDE FOR THE PUBLIC

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 a paper 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.

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 his or her petition presented in the House, a petitioner must secure a Member's assistance.

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 responsibility to certify that these requirements have been met.

This guide focuses on the process for creating and submitting paper petitions. For electronic petitions, please refer to the guide entitled *Electronic Petitions – Guide to Creating and Submitting 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 paper 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 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

Members of the public who wish to petition the House of Commons on a matter of public interest should first submit a draft of the petition (without signatures) to a Member of Parliament to see whether it is correctly worded and to determine whether the Member will agree to present it.

Presenting Paper Petitions

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

Presentation of a Petition

A Member may be asked to present a petition even if he or she does not represent the petitioner's electoral district. A Member who has been asked to present a petition in the House will normally do so, but is not obliged to and may ask another colleague to present it. In accepting to present a petition, a Member is not necessarily agreeing with the opinions or request set out in the petition.

A Member may present a certified petition in the House on any sitting day during Routine Proceedings or at any time during a sitting of the House by filing it with a Clerk at the Table in the Chamber. In both cases, 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. 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.

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 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 (the period of time between two sessions of a Parliament), 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.

For further information:

Clerk of Petitions
Room 131-N, Centre Block
House of Commons
Tel: 613-992-9511
Fax: 613-947-7626
Email pmb-aed@parl.gc.ca

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.)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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.)*

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____