How to Write a Petition

Why make a petition?

A petition is a good tool for a straightforward issue that has widespread support.

There are fifteen minutes set aside daily in the House of Commons for petitions to be read. There is no debate following the reading of the petition, but the government is required to respond to your petition within 45 days. If this fails to occur, the Member who presented the petition designates a committee of the House to look into the reasons why it was not responded to.

Your petition could spark interest on the part of Members of Parliament or it could influence a debate already occurring in the House of Commons. They can add pressure at the right time and build political will for action, but again, this needs to be a straightforward (yes/no) issue with a lot of support.

A petition with 1,000 to 10,000 signatures will receive some attention, but it is just one petition! To be more effective (taking more time out of the parliamentary day, getting more mentions in the record, and capturing the attention of more members), it is best to have chapters across Canada each working on the same or similar petitions, collecting at least 25 signatures but not necessarily more.

What is the procedure once they are sent to an MP?

If an MP is to read a petition in the House, she must first submit it to the Clerk of Petitions, who examines it to make sure that its form and content meet Parliamentary specifications. If it fails to meet them, it cannot be read for the record.

It is therefore important to follow the guidelines for an official petition to Parliament. You can also send a draft petition, before collecting signatures, to a Member of Parliament to ensure that it is correctly worded and to find out if she will be willing to read it in the House.

What are the Parliamentary specifications for petitions?

- Must be **addressed to the House of Commons** (not the Prime Minister or any individual MP)
- Use a **standard paper size** (8 ½ x 11 inches or 8 ½ by 14 inches).
- **Do not**: attach any other documents to the petition or print the petition on the reverse of another document.
- The petition must address a **federal issue** and must ask the government to take or not take a specific action.
- It must contain a **minimum of 25 Canadians’ signatures** (names signed, not printed). Each signature should be accompanied by the **signatory’s city and province of residence**.
- There is **no minimum age** requirement for signing a petition.
Note that certification usually takes three to five working days, and that petitions cannot be certified during an election period.

- The petition must be **respectful** in tone and language.
- The text of the petition must not be altered either by erasing or crossing out words or by adding words.

**What should the petition contain content-wise?**

- The petition statement should be **clear and concise**.
- Must contain a **request for action**, but must not demand or insist that Parliament do something
- Begin the statement with a phrase like: “We the undersigned residents of Canada affirm. . .”
- Keep it as **short as possible**, while laying out your concerns.
- Start with general principles and **progressively get more specific**, ending with your requests.
- Make sure that the **statement appears on each page** of the petition.

**[See sample petition in Toolkit]**

**Other Tips**

- Bring your petition to events where you expect there will be people who support it.
- Follow-up is important because it demonstrates that there is real commitment behind the signatures. Encourage signatories to write, call, or visit MPs to explain why they signed the petition.
- Arrange a meeting with your MP to explain the petition and formally ask them to present it in the House.

**Additional Information**

For questions about petitioning the federal government, call the Clerk of Petitions in Ottawa at (613) 992-9511.

[http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/process/house/Petitions/petitionsPG2008__Pgo2-e.htm](http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/process/house/Petitions/petitionsPG2008__Pgo2-e.htm) - official petition guide

[http://www.canlaw.com/parliament/petitionparliament.htm](http://www.canlaw.com/parliament/petitionparliament.htm) - good example given + guidelines

**Sources**

Websites listed above, plus Citizens for Public Justice website - [http://www.cpj.ca/en/content/how-write-petition](http://www.cpj.ca/en/content/how-write-petition)