



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

*P*etitions

Practical Guide

OCTOBER 2008





THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STONE

This sculpture, known as a “haut-relief”, graces the House of Commons Chamber and was co-designed by Eleanor Milne and Maurice Joanisse and carved by Maurice Joanisse. The base stone – which portrays an election campaign – was designed and carved by Maurice Joanisse. The entire haut-relief was installed on the west wall of the Chamber in 1985.

The artwork symbolizes the elected House of Commons. On top is a mythical figure – a Janus – who is addressing the present as well as looking back in time and forward to the future. The two figures in tilted oval frames represent the Leader of the Opposition on the right; and on the left, the leader of the governing party who is, of course, the Prime Minister. On the left and right hand sides of the image are twenty elected representatives composing a quorum – the minimum number of Members required to constitute a meeting of the House. In the centre towards the bottom of the image sits the Speaker, the spokesperson and presiding officer of the House; at the top stands the Sergeant-at-Arms with the Mace in hand prepared to maintain order. In the centre of the image stands the Clerk, the custodian of the records of the institution, and adviser to all Members, and in particular, the Speaker.

The House of Commons Stone is one of a series of twelve haut-reliefs depicting, in a symbolic and story form, the federal roles and responsibilities arising out of the *British North America Act*. They are all found in the Commons Chamber.



This publication is produced by Procedural Services of the House of Commons. Please consult the online version on the Parliament of Canada Web site (www.parl.gc.ca) for updates. The information contained in this Practical Guide may also be found in the Compendium of Procedure under Typical Sitting Day on the Parliament of Canada Web site (www.parl.gc.ca/compendium). For further information, please contact the Private Members' Business Office at pmb-aed@parl.gc.ca.



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Private Members' Business Office
House of Commons
Ottawa, Canada

Published under the authority
of the Clerk of the House of Commons

October 2008





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OVERVIEW



A PETITION IS USED TO DRAW ATTENTION TO AN ISSUE OF PUBLIC INTEREST OR CONCERN AND REQUEST THAT ACTION BE TAKEN.

A public petition, signed by Canadian residents and addressed to the House of Commons, the Government of Canada, a Minister of the Crown or a Member of the House of Commons, is one of the most direct means for people to communicate with Parliament.

Petitioners cannot directly petition the House of Commons. Only a Member of Parliament can present a petition to the House. The petitioners must send their petition to a Member with a request to present it.

Before a petition can be presented by a Member, it must be examined to confirm that it meets certain requirements established by the rules and practices of the House. A Member wishing to present a petition must first submit the petition to the Clerk of Petitions for certification.

A petition can be presented to the House by a Member, either by presenting it during Routine Proceedings or by filing it with the Clerk of the House during a sitting.

The rules of the House require that the government reply to a petition within 45 calendar days of its presentation. If such a petition remains without a response at the expiration of this time, a committee of the House, designated by the Member presenting the petition, is required to look into the Ministry's failure to respond.

FORM AND CONTENT OF PETITIONS – GUIDELINES

Before a petition can be presented by a Member, it must be examined to confirm that it meets certain requirements established by the rules and practices of the House (described below). A Member wishing to present a petition must first submit the petition to the Clerk of Petitions for certification.

Recommended forms of petitions to the House of Commons are set out on the last pages of this guide.



FORM OF A PETITION

Addressee

A petition must be addressed to one of the following:

- the House of Commons;
- 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

A petition must contain a request, sometimes also referred to as a prayer, for the addressee to take some action (or refrain from taking some action) to remedy a grievance.

A petition may also include a more detailed description of the grievance and/or a statement of opinion. However, a statement of grievance or opinion alone cannot be received as a petition.

The request should be clear and to the point.

The petition must not demand or insist that the addressee do something.

The petition may include a return address.

Written, Typewritten or Printed on Paper of Usual Size

The text of a 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 1/2 x 11 inches) or 21.5 cm x 35.5 cm (8 1/2 x 14 inches). A petition submitted on paper of irregular size, or on any other material, is not acceptable.

Language

A petition must be respectful, use temperate language, and not contain improper, disrespectful or unparliamentary language. In particular, there should be no disrespect shown to the Sovereign or charge made against the character or conduct of Parliament, the courts or any other duly constituted authority.

A petition must be written in one or both of the official languages.



FORM AND CONTENT OF
PETITIONS – GUIDELINES

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, whether in the form of additional documents, maps, pictures, logos, news articles, explanatory or supporting statements, or requests for support. A petition printed on the reverse of a document (for example a newsletter or a Member's Householder or Ten Percenter) is not acceptable.

Subject-Matter Indicated on Every Sheet

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

CONTENT

Matters Within Federal Jurisdiction

A petition must concern a subject 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 or any matter which should be brought before a court of law or a tribunal.

Requesting Expenditure of Public Funds

A petition may include a request for the expenditure of public funds.

Signatures and Addresses

A petition must contain a minimum of 25 valid signatures with addresses.

A petition should contain signatures of residents of Canada only. Persons not resident in Canada cannot petition the House of Commons of Canada. A petition signed exclusively by non-resident persons is not acceptable.

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



**FORM AND CONTENT OF
PETITIONS – GUIDELINES**

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.

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

Some signatures and addresses must appear on the first sheet with the text of the petition. Signatures and addresses may appear on the reverse of the petition.

The address may either be the petitioner's full home address, or the city and province, or the province and postal code. As with the signature, the address must be written directly on the document and not pasted, taped, photocopied or otherwise transferred to it. The inclusion of other contact information (such as telephone numbers or email addresses) is permitted but not required.

A Member of the House of Commons may sign a petition, but should ask another Member to present that petition. The signatures of Members inscribed on a petition are not counted towards the required 25 signatures and addresses.

DRAFT PETITIONS

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



PRESENTING PETITIONS

CERTIFICATION

Before a Member can present a petition in the House, the rules of the House of Commons require that it must first be certified correct as to form and content.

Petitions for certification should be sent by a Member to the Clerk of Petitions, Private Members' Business Office, Room 134-C, Centre Block.

The Member submitting the petition should be clearly indicated. 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 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 explanatory note.

Response to Petition – Committee Selection

The rules of the House require that the government reply to a petition within 45 calendar days. If a petition remains without a response at the expiration of this time, a standing committee of the House is required to look into the Ministry's failure to respond. A certified petition returned to a Member will be accompanied by a form, to be signed by the Member, on which the Member must indicate the committee to which the Ministry's failure to respond will be referred.

This form must accompany the certified petition when the petition is presented in the House.



PRESENTING PETITIONS

PRESENTATION OF A PETITION

Any Member of Parliament may be asked to present a petition even if he or she does not represent the petitioners.

Nothing in the rules or practices of the House requires a Member to present a petition he or she has received. The Member may even ask another Member to present the petition.

Endorsement by Member

Once a petition has been certified, any Member may present it. The Member presenting it must endorse the petition by signing the back of the last page of the petition.

Photocopies of Petitions

It is advisable for a Member 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 During Routine Proceedings

A Member may present a certified and endorsed 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.

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

When presenting a petition, no debate is permitted. A Member may make a brief factual statement, referring 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. Petitions are not to be read in their entirety. The statement is reproduced in Hansard, the official record of the debates, and a record of the petition appears in the *Journals* for that day.



PRESENTING PETITIONS

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.

Under the authority of the Clerk of the House, 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 and collection of a reply.

Each petition receives an individual response. Any Member who has presented a petition is provided with a copy of the response at the time it is tabled. After being tabled in the House, a government response to a petition (unlike the petition itself) 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 the content of the responses, and the intervention is reproduced in the *Debates of the House of Commons*. The government response to a petition may also be deposited with the Clerk.

The rules of the House make no provision for sanctions in the event that the government fails to respond to a petition within 45 calendar days. However, 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 failure of the Ministry to respond.

While most business of the House is terminated when Parliament is prorogued, government responses to petitions presented in a previous session must be tabled in a subsequent session. The dissolution of Parliament ends any requirement for the government to respond to a petition.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Clerk of Petitions
Private Members' Business Office
Room 134-C, Centre Block
House of Commons
Tel 613-992-9511
Fax 613-947-7626



RECOMMENDED FORMS OF PETITIONS

THE FOLLOWING ARE RECOMMENDED FORMS OF PETITIONS.

SAMPLE A — FIRST PAGE OF PETITION

PETITION TO THE _____ *Here identify either*
(House of Commons, House of Commons in Parliament assembled,
Government of Canada, Minister of the Crown,
Member of Parliament)

We, the undersigned, _____ *Here identify, in general terms, who the petitioners are, for example*
- citizens (or residents) of Canada
- electors of (*name of electoral district*)
- residents of the Province of (*name*)
- residents of the City (or Village or Township, etc.) of (*name*)

draw the attention of the _____ *Here identify either*
(House of Commons, House of Commons in Parliament assembled,
Government of Canada, Minister of the Crown,
Member of Parliament)

to the following:

THAT _____ *Here briefly state the reasons underlying the request for the intervention of the addressee by outlining the grievance or problem or by summarizing the facts which the petitioners wish the addressee to consider.*

THEREFORE, your _____ *Here identify either*
petitioners request
(or call upon) the
(House of Commons, House of Commons in Parliament assembled,
Government of Canada, Minister of the Crown,
Member of Parliament)

To _____ *Here set out the request by stating succinctly what action the petitioners wish the addressee to take or what action it should refrain from taking.*

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

Addresses
(Give your full home address, or your city and province, or province and postal code.)



SAMPLE B — FIRST PAGE OF PETITION

PETITION TO THE _____ *Here identify either*
(House of Commons, House of Commons in Parliament assembled,
Government of Canada, Minister of the Crown, Member of Parliament)

WHEREAS: _____ *Optional statement of facts*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

We, the undersigned, _____ *Here identify, in general terms, who the petitioners are, for example*
- citizens (or residents) of Canada
- electors of (*name of electoral district*)
- residents of the Province of (*name*)
- residents of the City (or Village or Township, etc.) of (*name*)

request
(or call upon) the _____ *Here identify either*
(House of Commons, House of Commons in Parliament assembled,
Government of Canada, Minister of the Crown, Member of Parliament)

To _____ *Here set out the request by stating succinctly what action the petitioners wish the addressee to take or what action it should refrain from taking.*

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

Addresses
(Give your full home address, or your city and province, or province and postal code.)

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



SAMPLE B — SUBSEQUENT PAGES OF PETITION (EXAMPLE 1)

THEREFORE, we request

(or call upon) _____ *Here repeat the request from the first page of the petition.*

Signatures

(Sign your own name. Do not print.)

Addresses

(Give your full home address, or your city and province, or province and postal code.)

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

SAMPLE B — SUBSEQUENT PAGES OF PETITION (EXAMPLE 2)

Petition concerning _____ *Here state the subject matter of the petition.*

Signatures

(Sign your own name. Do not print.)

Addresses

(Give your full home address, or your city and province, or province and postal code.)

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



SAMPLE C — FIRST PAGE OF PETITION

PETITION TO THE _____ *Here identify either*
(House of Commons, House of Commons in Parliament assembled,
Government of Canada, Minister of the Crown,
Member of Parliament)

We, the undersigned, _____ *Here identify, in general terms, who the petitioners are, for example*
- citizens (or residents) of Canada
- electors of (*name of electoral district*)
- residents of the Province of (*name*)
- residents of the City (or Village or Township, etc.) of (*name*)

wish to bring to your attention _____ *Here briefly state the reasons underlying the request for the intervention of the addressee by outlining the grievance or problem or by summarizing the facts which the petitioners wish the addressee to consider.*

THEREFORE, we request (or call upon) the _____ *Here identify either*
(House of Commons, House of Commons in Parliament assembled,
Government of Canada, Minister of the Crown,
Member of Parliament)

To _____ *Here set out the request by stating succinctly what action the petitioners wish the addressee to take or what action it should refrain from taking.*

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

Addresses
(Give your full home address, or your city and province, or province and postal code.)



SAMPLE C — SUBSEQUENT PAGES OF PETITION (EXAMPLE 1)

THEREFORE, we request
(or call upon) _____ *Here repeat the request from the first page of the petition.*

Signatures (Sign your own name. Do not print.)	Addresses (Give your full home address, or your city and province, or province and postal code.)
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

SAMPLE C — SUBSEQUENT PAGES OF PETITION (EXAMPLE 2)

Petition concerning _____ *Here state the subject matter of the petition.*

Signatures (Sign your own name. Do not print.)	Addresses (Give your full home address, or your city and province, or province and postal code.)
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____