



**Legislative Assembly
Parliament of Victoria**

Fact Sheet 8

Petitions

Purpose

A petition is a direct way for citizens or groups to place their concerns before Parliament and ask for action to be taken. It is a way of demonstrating to the government issues that members of the public feel strongly about.

History

The practice of petitioning Parliament dates back to the reign of King Edward I in the thirteenth century. The modern form of petitions was developed in the seventeenth century by the House of Commons in England. In 1669 the House agreed:

That it is an inherent right of every commoner of England to prepare and present petitions to the House in case of grievance and of the House of Commons to receive them.

During this time, the presentation of a petition acted as the trigger for new laws. At a time when the right to vote was restricted, the petition was also an important way for people who had no parliamentary representation to have their complaints heard.

The impact of petitions has reduced in modern times. Public complaints can now be brought to the attention of members of Parliament through the media or other parliamentary proceedings such as question time.

Petitions today are usually part of a broader campaign used by community groups to raise public awareness on different issues. Petitioning may not result in immediate action, but it can help to form a public opinion which may ultimately bring about change.

Rules Regarding Petitions

The procedural rules of the Legislative Assembly set out requirements for the format, content and presentation of petitions. Standing Orders 44 to 52 describe the required form and the Assembly's procedures for the presentation of petitions.

These rules are in place to ensure the authenticity of petitions and to protect both petitioners and the Assembly. Abusing the petition procedure, for example, signing in someone else's name, could be found to be a contempt of Parliament. The main requirements are covered below.

Form

- Petitions need to be addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Victoria.
- A petition to be presented in the Legislative Assembly must only be addressed to the Assembly and not to the Legislative Council as well.
- A brief paragraph(s) must be included giving the reasons for the petition and should end with the action asked for. If a petition is more than one sheet long, each page must be headed with these details.
- The details should be photocopied or printed on each sheet before it is signed. Wording pasted to a page of signatories is not allowed.
- The signatures must be numbered on each page, starting with number 1 for the first signature on every sheet.
- No letters, affidavits or other documents (other than translations) can be attached or incorporated on the front of a petition sheet.
- The back of each petition sheet should be left blank (other than a continuation of signatures from the front), however material that is inconsequential or irrelevant to the terms of the petition is permissible.

Content

- The petition must be legible.
- The wording must be respectful and not offensive.
- Petitions need to be in English, or attached to a certified translation if in another language.
- Only issues which the Assembly has authority to deal with can be raised (some matters, for example, are the responsibility of the federal parliament in Canberra).
- No information that seeks support for the petition should be added, although a note giving a name and/or address for the return of the petition is allowed.

Signatories

- Every petition must be signed by at least one person.
- All signatures must be hand written.
- Signatures must be original — photocopies and scanned signatures are not allowed.
- No-one can sign on behalf of another person. However, a petitioner incapable of signing may get someone else to sign for him or her.
- Each person must include his or her name, signature and address (only Victorian addresses are acceptable).
- A person must live in Victoria to be able to sign the petition.

- Names, addresses and signatures can only be written on headed petition sheets.

Arranging Presentation

- Petitions can only be lodged for presentation by a member. This does not need to be the petitioners' local member. Petitioners should contact a member to make arrangements. *Petitions should not be sent direct to Parliament House.*
- The member presenting the petition must sign it in the top right-hand corner on the first page.
- Members are not signing as a petitioner and do not need to agree with its contents.
- The member will arrange presentation with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. The Clerk will check that the petition meets all requirements for presentation.
- A member cannot lodge his or her own petition.

Presentation to the House

- Petitions are presented during formal business (explained in *Fact Sheet 1: A Typical Sitting Day in the House*).
- The Clerk announces the name of the member who lodged the petition, who the petitioners are, the subject matter of the petition and the number of signatures. These details are printed in Hansard.
- The Clerk sends the relevant minister a copy of the front sheet of each petition for his or her information.
- As an alternative procedure, under standing orders, a member can read the terms of a petition and the number of signatories instead of making a 90-second statement (explained in *Fact Sheet 5: Opportunities for Debate*).

Number of Petitions Presented

The number of petitions presented in the Assembly since 1996 has averaged 146 per year. The number of signatures on any one petition has varied from the minimum of one signature up to many thousands. Some of the larger petitions received in recent years include the Re-Introduction of Capital Punishment petition in April 1999 with 51,645 signatures and the Women's Petition 2001 in May 2001 with 41,487 signatures.

Further Inquiries

Further inquiries concerning petitions should be directed to the Assistant Clerk Committees, Parliament House, East Melbourne. Phone (03) 9651 8553.

Petition Template

A template of the required format of petitions is set out on the next page.

Example of how petitions must be set out:

(these details must appear at the top of each sheet)

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria

The Petition of

(insert here the names or descriptions of the petitioner or petitioners, such as residents of Victoria or residents of [name of town, region or electorate in Victoria])

draws to the attention of the House

or

points out to the House

(insert here the circumstances of the issue)

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria

(insert here the request of the petitioners, showing clearly the nature of the remedy or action requested)

NAME	ADDRESS	SIGNATURE
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Issued by the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, March 2009

Fact Sheets

The Legislative Assembly Procedure Office has produced a series of Fact Sheets that explain parliamentary procedure and terminology. All Fact Sheets are available on Parliament's website www.parliament.vic.gov.au or through the Procedure Office.

Contact Details

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