

PETITIONING The Scottish Parliament

Petitions

Any individual, group or organisation can submit a petition, with any number of signatures, to either the Scottish parliament or UK Parliament. Petitions are generally used as a way of raising an issue of large-scale public concern with the parliament and asking them to consider the need for change.

The petitions system in the Scottish Parliament is very different to that of Westminster. The Public Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament is a mandatory committee (ie it is written into the Standing Orders of the parliament that there will always be such a committee) and public petitions are an important gateway into the parliamentary processes.

Why petition the Scottish Parliament?

Over the past few years there have been considerable successes through petitioning; Committee inquiries have been informed by and even initiated by petitions. Issues have been picked up in the media. Petitions have resulted in parliamentary debates and Executive reviews. A few have even brought about changes to legislation. So petitioning the Scottish Parliament can be an effective lobbying tool. However, a petition might run for a long time, as communications about the issues go back and forth between committees and between the parliament and the Scottish Government and the petitioners. And of course not all petitions will result in significant action. However, it is guaranteed that each one will be looked at by the Public Petitions Committee at least. Some voluntary organisations have found petitioning useful as one part of their campaign, rather than as the sole or main focus of their lobbying activity, and others have found it useful for addressing a very specific concern.

What can the petition be about?

Basically a petition can be about any matter of public interest or concern, and will make a request for the parliament to act, – eg debate an issue, hold an inquiry, set up a new procedure, or urge the Scottish Government to act – eg review its guidance, introduce legislation etc. If the petition is to initiate legislation, this must be on a devolved area.

A petition cannot be used to appeal against a local decision, but it may urge a review of guidance, laws, procedures or rules that would influence such a decision. If the Public Petitions Committee does not consider your petition to be valid, the clerk will contact you and may suggest changes.



What goes into the petition?

Read the guidance on petitions on the Scottish Parliament website, and take a look at the template for petitions published there.

www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/petitions/furtherInfo.htm

As well as the text of the petition itself you will need to give a one-line title, background information to the reasons behind the petition, and details of who has already been approached to resolve the issue, with copies of letters and replies, and contact details of the main petitioner. If the matter concerns a local body, such as a local authority or health board, you will need to show how you have tried to resolve the issue with the relevant body first.

Remember you are petitioning the Scottish Parliament, so if you want the Scottish Government to act, you will ask the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to act. It can be useful to take a look at how other petitions are worded, and to consult the Petitions Committee clerk.

www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/petitions/open/index50.htm

You can draw up, publish and gather support for your petition online through the Scottish Parliament petitioner service. You can submit signatures collected in hard copy, online, or both, provided that these are not duplications. (Signatures are checked for repeat signing) The petitioner pages of the Scottish Parliament website tell you everything you need to know about using the electronic system <http://epetitions.scottish.parliament.uk/>

How many signatures are needed?

Only one. The number of signatures will make no difference to whether or how the petition is considered. If it is valid it will be looked at by at least the Public Petitions Committee. However a good number of signatures does show support for the points you are making and will be needed if you are planning to generate media interest in the issue.

How to submit your petition

Petitions may be sent to the Scottish Parliament by freepost, if you hand it into a Post Office clearly marked *Petition to the Scottish Parliament*. Or to hand in the petition in person, contact the Public Petitions Committee Clerk. Talk to the clerk in advance if you would like to hand the petition over formally with a press reception. Electronic petitions will need to be submitted by following the instructions on the petitioner pages.



What happens next?

The Public Petitions Committee will consider your petition and may:

- agree to take no further action
- forward it to another committee (or the Parliamentary Bureau, the Presiding Officer etc.) in the Scottish Parliament.
- forward it to another body, e.g. the Scottish Government, a health board or local government
- recommend the petition for debate
- invite the petitioners into a committee meeting to talk about their petition.

A lot of petitions are forwarded to subject committees for further consideration. The clerk will keep you informed about what is happening with your petition. The Public Petitions Committee Clerk will also be a helpful source of information, if you have any queries regarding the process and getting started.

