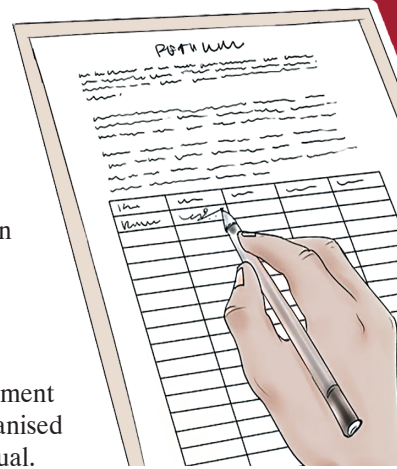


Petitions for Advocacy



Petitions are a way to show that there is a widespread degree of support for an issue. A petition can be sent to any decision-maker. There are special rules for petitions to Parliament.

What is a petition?

A petition is a letter in a special format which is signed by many people. It is a request to Government or Parliament or some other decision-maker to take a specific action. Petitions are usually organised by civil society groups, but they can be started by any kind of group or even by a single individual.

At the top of a petition, there is a statement. The statement explains what action Government, or other decision-makers, should take and why. The petition is then circulated and people are asked to show their support for the statement by signing a list below the statement. After the signatures have been collected, the petition is delivered to the person or group with the power to take the requested action.

A petition is a useful tool to show a decision-maker that there is widespread support for your opinion or demand. The greater the number of supporters, the more effective your petition will be.

Where to send a petition

Make sure you are sending your petition to a person or body that has the power to take the action you request in the petition. If you send it to the wrong body, they will probably just send it back and tell you that they have no authority over the matter. It is always wise to contact the person or body you are addressing the petition to before you start collecting signatures, to make sure that they do indeed have authority over the matter. **For example, if you want to write a petition demanding improvements to the water supply in your neighbourhood, you will want to address the petition to your local authority's chief executive officer. If you want to write a petition demanding that Government spend more money on primary education, you might want to send the petition to the government ministers responsible for education and finance and also to the Speaker of the National Assembly.**

Recruiting support for a petition

Collecting signatures for a petition is also a good opportunity to raise awareness about an issue. You and other people in your organisation can approach friends, family and fellow workers to sign the petition. You can organise a workshop to educate people about the issue, and ask people to sign the petition during the workshop. You can set up information booths on the petition at shopping centres and markets, and ask people to stop and discuss the issue and sign the petition.

Structure of a petition

A petition has two parts – (a) **the statement** and (b) **the signatures** of people who support the statement, along with some identifying information about them.

STATEMENT: The statement in the petition is sometimes called a “prayer”. Your statement should be as short and clear as possible. You can write the statement in any language – but all the people who sign must be able to understand what it says, and if it is going to Parliament, it must be accompanied by a sworn translation into English. (Only certain people are authorised to make sworn translations. You can enquire at a magistrate’s court about finding a sworn translator.) **If the signatures cover more than one page, each page must have the statement on the top of the page to show that people knew what they were signing.** This is very important. If the statement does not appear at the top of each page, your petition will not be considered. Make sure that there are no mistakes in the petition before you start collecting signatures. The National Assembly requires that any changes or corrections made to the petition must be signed or initialled by each person who signs the petition. It is much easier to make sure the petition is correct from the start.

If the petition is going to the National Assembly, you should make sure that you have taken any other appropriate steps first (such as approaching any relevant authorities directly, or asking the Ombudsman for help), and that no other petition on the same issue has been submitted during the same term of Parliament (during the time since the current Members of Parliament took office). ►

SIGNATURES: A signatory who cannot write can make a cross or a mark. If a signatory places a mark instead of a signature on a petition, it must be done in the presence of two witnesses who must sign the petition saying that they witnessed the signatory placing the mark on the petition. If a person is unable to make a mark because of some disability, someone signing on his/her behalf must state this fact beside the signature. It is important that the petition also includes some identifying information about the people who sign the document, to show that the petition was really signed by the people who are listed – and that the supporters are not just a list of made-up names. Some useful information to include:

- **Full name:** There should be a space to print each person's name clearly and a place for the signature beside it. Be sure that each name is written clearly and be sure that no one signs the petition more than once.
- **Identity numbers:** If no identity number is available, include the person's date of birth.
- **Personal details:** You might include information such as male/female or age. There is no minimum age for signing petitions, but politicians may be more interested in signatures of persons over age 18 since they are eligible to vote.
- **Contact details:** These could include street address, postal address and/or phone number. But it is not a problem if signatories do not want to include their contact details – a signature and some other identifying information should be sufficient to show that the signature is a valid one.

Submitting a petition

There are many ways to deliver a petition to the relevant decision-maker. If the petition is national in scope, you might want the local groups and individuals working on your campaign to send their completed petition sheets directly to the relevant authority, or you might want to collect all the petition sheets at a central point so that you can count the total number of signatories and deliver all the sheets in one batch. You might want to set up a personal meeting to hand over the completed petition sheets to the relevant authority. You might want to hand over the petition during a public demonstration or at a public event which can attract media coverage. In this case, you should make arrangements with the person who will be receiving the petition in advance – it is not helpful to catch someone by surprise, and without advance arrangements you may find that the relevant person is not available. Always keep a photocopy of the petition for yourself, in case it somehow goes astray.

- **Petitions to ministries:** Address your petition to the **Permanent Secretary** of the Ministry in question.
- **Petitions to National Assembly:** A petition to the National Assembly should be addressed to the National Assembly and sent to the **Secretary of the National Assembly**. The Secretary will forward it to the relevant Parliament committee for consideration. The committee will make a report on the petition to the Standing Committee on Rules and Orders. If the petition meets all the requirements in the National Assembly's rules, it will be tabled in the National Assembly.
- **Petitions to National Council:** A petition to the National Council should be addressed to the Chairperson of the National Council and given to the **Chairperson** or **Secretary of the National Council**.
- **Petitions to regional councils or local authority councils:** A petition on a regional or local issue should be addressed to the relevant council and given to the council's **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)**.
- **Other groups:** Address your petition to the person with authority over the issue in question. For example, if the issue concerns your employer, send your petition to the top official in the company or to the person in charge of the relevant division. If the issue concerns your school, send your petition to the principal or the School Board. If the issue concerns your church, send it to the pastor or the governing body of the religious denomination.

Follow-up action

After submitting a petition, you may want to contact the authority who received it to determine what steps have been taken to address the issues raised in your statement. You may want to set up a meeting with the relevant authorities to address the issues in more detail. ■

FORM OF PETITION TO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

TO: The National Assembly

The humble petition of (here insert the names or description of the Petitioner(s) [the people who organised the petition])

SHEWETH That (here set forth the case or circumstances to be brought to the notice of the National Assembly)

Wherefore your Petitioner(s) prays (or pray) that (here set forth the particular object of the petitioner or nature of relief asked for, and further state action already taken to address concerns raised in the petition – such as: having submitted such complaints to the Ombudsman; having requested the Ministry/Department/Agency concerned to review legislation or policy), having ascertained whether a similar issue was not brought before the National Assembly on a previous occasion and finally having ensured that no complaints on unconnected matters to those raised are contained in the petition.

And your Petitioner(s), as in duty bound, will ever pray, et cetera.

Signature(s) with address(es) to follow.

You may not attach any additional documents to the petition.

Note also that the statements in the petition must be respectful, decorous and moderate in language.

The statement must not contain irrelevant information.

If you do not follow these rules, your petition may be rejected.

Standing Rules and Orders of National Assembly, 15 October 2015
(as amended on 10 November 2015 and 6 April 2016)

EXAMPLES OF TECHNIQUES FOR GETTING YOUR PETITION NOTICED

- Arrange for **public signing events** and invite the media. If you can arrange for a local celebrity to sign, this would make a good photo opportunity for the press.
- Use **one long roll of paper** (such as newsprint). Write the petition neatly at the top of the roll of paper and have people sign below it. You can then roll out the paper along the ground or hang it from a high wall to show its length. This would make a good photo opportunity for the press.
- Make petitions out of **large pieces of cloth**. Display them in public places, with paint for supporters to add a hand print or footprint next to their signature.