

Action Guide

PETITIONING PARLIAMENT

If you feel really strongly about an issue and you think Parliament needs to act on it, one option is a petition to Parliament.

You've probably seen heaps of general petitions around. Examples might include:

- the local bike store has a petition on its counter to get the local council to put bike lanes on the roads
- a stall on the footpath with someone collecting signatures for an environmental campaign
- petitions that are circulated by email or on the internet.

What is a petition to Parliament?

A petition to Parliament is a request (signed by at least one person, but usually many people) that may try to:

- get the Government to change a law so that it works better
- ask the Government to change the way it is dealing with a national issue
- ask for more examination and thought about an issue (i.e. call for an inquiry).

Anyone of any age may petition the House of Representatives.

Office of the Ombudsmen

Before you start a petition, contact the Office of the Ombudsmen.

The Office of the Ombudsmen can investigate and review decisions, recommendations or Acts relating to government departments, related organisations and local authorities.

For more information, visit the website www.ombudsmen.govt.nz.

What can I petition Parliament about?

You need to make sure that you have done everything else possible to get your message to Parliament and the decision-makers before you launch into doing a petition.

Doing a petition is a **BIG** thing. Ask yourself – is this an issue that:

- ✓ I strongly believe the government needs to do something about?
- ✓ I know that other people also feel strongly about?

REMEMBER, the more people who sign the petition, the more powerful it is.

How do I write the petition?

Parliament is really strict about the way petitions are set out otherwise, it will get sent back to you.

- Contact the Office of the Clerk to ensure no petition with a similar request has already been considered during the current term of Parliament. Phone: 64 4 471 9999, email: petitions@clerk.parliament.govt.nz.
- Start the petition with the name, address and phone number of the principal petitioner. This is the person who started or organised the petition.
- Write your petition in English or Māori. Use respectful language, and keep your request simple and clear.
- Explain the action you want Parliament to do. Don't include irrelevant statements.
- Sign the cover sheet and provide your address. This will be used for any correspondence related to the petition.
- Ensure each signature sheet is addressed to the House of Representatives by writing or typing the words 'To the House of Representatives' on the top of each signature sheet. Under that line, write the request of the petition as it appears on the cover sheet.



- Include space for people to write their name and sign. People are not required to include their address, but their signature must be original.
- Your petition needs to be presented to Parliament by an MP. The easiest way to do this is to ask your local MP. An MP presents a petition by delivering it to the Clerk of the House.
- Presenting a petition does not mean an MP agrees with the petition's purpose. The MP presenting the petition must sign the cover sheet.

Check out the 'Presenting a submission to a select committee' action guide for more information.

What happens next?

When petitions are delivered by MPs to the Clerk of the House, they are checked. If your petition complies with the rules of the House, it is presented. If your petition does not comply, it will be returned to the MP.

When a petition is presented, it is allocated to the appropriate select committee and announced in the House.

The select committee can choose how to deal with a petition. It might decide to get more information (a submission) from you. You may be asked to provide information regarding the specific nature of the petition. Your submission should be in writing. A committee may also request submissions from government departments and other interested parties.

Select committees may also hear oral evidence and oral submissions from the public.

A select committee has a variety of options available when reporting on a petition to the House. These include:

- a report with recommendations
- a report with no recommendations at all
- if a petition was considered with another item of business, the committee may acknowledge that and include the petition in its report on that item.

Sometimes, select committee say that nothing more should be done with the petition and its request. That doesn't mean your petition was a waste of time. Petitions are about getting important messages heard – you have achieved that.

The clerk of the committee will notify you of the outcome of a committee's decision once the report on your petition is made to the House.

If the select committee recommends actions, this goes to the Government. The Government then has 90 days to decide what it will do about the select committee's recommendations. The final government report is printed and available on the parliamentary website.

For more information about Parliament and Government, go to www.parliament.nz or www.decisionmaker.co.nz.