

## 'youth voices'

### WRITE A SUBMISSION TO PARLIAMENT

One of the ways you can get your voice heard by government and be part of the decision-making process is to share your opinion on a new law or change an old one. This is called making a submission to a select committee.

New Zealand is a democracy so that means we can all have our say and influence the big decisions that affect us all.

Whether you are 14 or 40, a student or a doctor, all public submissions are given the same respect and value. You don't have to have any special knowledge (and you can be any age) to write a submission. All you need is an interest in a current hot topic.

Most of the time, however, it is adults and adult organisations that write submissions on bills. So get busy and get your voice heard on bills that affect you!

Just remember, sometimes decisions go the way we want and other times they don't. If a decision is different from what you wanted, it doesn't mean you weren't heard.

#### Bills and laws

All laws start life off as a bill. Any member of parliament (MP) [see *Action Guide 6: Writing to Politicians* for more information] can introduce a bill to parliament but most bills are introduced by Ministers and are known as "Government Bills". Some bills make it through the massive process to become laws, while others get dropped because more MPs are against it than for it.

It is a pretty tough life for a bill trying to become a law. All bills get debated three times in parliament. After the first debate about it in parliament, the bill goes to a select committee for a really good examination. This is where the people of New Zealand get the chance to have their say.

#### Around the select committee table

There are 13 different select committees. Each one has about eight MPs from different parties in parliament. Each select committee focuses on one or two big national topics like "health" or "justice".

One of the jobs of the select committee is to examine bills and then report back to parliament. The select committee gets into the details of the bill and finds out what New Zealanders think through a public submission process. Most bills are advertised in newspapers around New Zealand to encourage submissions.

Generally submissions to select committees become public, which means that anyone can see what you (or your group) have said.



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## The mission: to write a submission

Heaps of different individuals, groups of people and organisations write submissions on bills. Organisations from the Automobile Association to university students' associations write submissions on bills they have an interest in.

People write submissions because they either like or don't like the bill. If they like the bill, they write to let the select committee know why they support the bill becoming a law. If they dislike the bill, they write to protest against the bill becoming law and explain why they think it is a really bad idea. Some people also ask to present their submission in person and speak directly to the select committee.

You can see which submissions are being called for or what submissions different organisations' have made on bills on the web:

- go to [www.clerk.parliament.govt.nz](http://www.clerk.parliament.govt.nz)
- click on "select committees"
- then click on either "submissions called for" or "submissions received".

## Getting active on a submission

Think about getting together with other young people on a subject you all feel strongly about and writing a group submission. If you are part of a youth group, the group could write a submission together.

Encourage other young people to make submissions – it is important young people share their views on bills that interest or relate to them!

## What's the process?

An effective and powerful submission is a simple one that sets out your own or the group's views on the subject.

### 1. Find out what bills are asking for public submissions.

Check out: [www.clerk.parliament.govt.nz/programme/committees/submissions/](http://www.clerk.parliament.govt.nz/programme/committees/submissions/)

You can see a short blurb of info about the bill, the date it's due and where you need to send your submission.

### 2. It is important to be clued-up. Do some research to develop your opinions and key message.

Get to know the bill by reading about it. You don't need to actually buy the bill, but make sure you know what's in it. Look at newspapers and the web. Check out: [www.knowledge-basket.co.nz/gpprint/docs/welcome](http://www.knowledge-basket.co.nz/gpprint/docs/welcome)

The trick to a good submission is being able to say **why** you think the way you do. What are the reasons you are for or against a bill becoming law?

Imagine there was a bill to make Saturdays a school day (scary). Probably most school students would want to make a submission protesting the bill becoming a law. However, saying "no" to school on Saturdays is not enough.

What select committees want to know is why you oppose the bill becoming a law.

Some different ways to research bills include:

- **Web search:** Do a website search on the bill and you will find a bunch of different opinions to help you develop your own opinion. Who do you agree with/ disagree with? Why?
- **Average Jo Bloggs research:** Talk to other young people, the next door neighbour, your grandparents – basically anyone interested in the issue. The more you talk with others, the clearer your thoughts on the topic will become.
- **Newspaper research:** If the bill is a hot topic in New Zealand, it will get lots of attention in the media with newspaper articles and letters to the editor. Cut these out and use them to update your views on the topic.

If you disagree with the points of view, what would your argument back be? This may be the beginning of your submission.

### 3. Lay it on with your layout.

- Start with your key messages about why you support or oppose the bill.
- Use the rest of your submission to back up your key messages.
- Use bullet points rather than long sentences.
- Type it up or print it neatly.
- Include your name and address.
- Use one side of an A4 sheet (same size as this Action Guide).

### 4. Get a friendly proof reader.

Get someone to read your submission before you send it off. Here are some questions to help them out.

- Is the key message clear?
- What needs more explanation?
- Is there anything repetitive?
- Does it make sense?
- Does it keep to the subject?

### 5. Make multiple copies.

Make sure you check how many copies of your submission you need to send. The web address below will tell you. You usually have to send between 20 and 30 copies!

### 6. Post it off before the deadline!

Send your submission to the clerk of the committee before the closing date. Their details are different for each submission process and select committee. Find the clerk's address and the closing date for submissions on: [www.clerk.parliament.govt.nz/Programme/Committees/Submissions/](http://www.clerk.parliament.govt.nz/Programme/Committees/Submissions/)

## More info

Go to: [www.clerk.parliament.govt.nz/Programme/Committees/Submissions/](http://www.clerk.parliament.govt.nz/Programme/Committees/Submissions/)  
On the left sidebar, there is a link called "How to make a submission". This links to a PDF booklet on "Making a Submission to a Parliamentary Select Committee".