



PETITIONS

A petition is a formal written document containing a list of signatures from ACT residents to members of the Legislative Assembly seeking the redress of a grievance. Any citizen or group of citizens of the ACT can submit a petition asking for an action to be taken by the Assembly. It can also ask the Assembly to consider action concerning a personal grievance (for example, an administrative error). A petition must address an issue that is related to the jurisdiction of the ACT Assembly and not that of another state or territory parliament or the Federal Parliament.

HISTORY

The origins of petitions date back to the reign of King Edward I (1239-1307). The right to petition both the British Crown and Parliament was recognised in the Magna Carta (1215) and in the English Bill of Rights (1689).

Early legislation in England was actually a petition agreed to by the King and in fact the terms 'bill' and 'petition' originally had the same meaning. The modern form of petitions developed in the 17th century. The House of Commons passed the following resolutions in 1669:

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.

That it is the undoubted right and privilege of the House of Commons to adjudge and determine, touching the nature and matter of such Petitions, how far they are fit and unfit to be received.

The Assembly follows this tradition today.

RULES

There are many rules set out in the standing orders on the format and content of petitions. Every petition must be the original sheet signed by citizens of the ACT who support the petition.

The request must be written on every page containing signatures. Signatures may not be

photocopied, pasted or transferred. All petitions must be respectful, accurate and reasonable. They must not contain irrelevant statements.

A petition must not be sponsored or distributed by a member of the Legislative Assembly of the ACT. The petition must be written in English or accompanied by a certified translation and be addressed to the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly. Any person who wishes to petition the Assembly must forward the petition to a member and ask him or her to present it. Members are not obliged to present a petition to the Assembly. Where a member does agree to table a petition, this does not imply that the member supports its content.

PRESENTATION

Petitions must be lodged by a member of the Assembly with the Clerk by 5.00pm on the day before they are to be presented to the Assembly. The Clerk will check and certify that the petition complies with all the rules. A petition is usually presented to the Assembly immediately after the Speaker opens the morning session. The Clerk states which member lodged the petition, the number of signatures and the request that is being made. The petition will not be debated by the Assembly when it is presented. The terms of the petition, without the signatures, are printed in Hansard.

E-PETITIONS

In 2013 the Legislative Assembly launched e-petitions to allow for the presentation of petitions in an electronic form. Prior to this it was only possible to present petitions in a paper form. The key difference between the paper based and electronic forms is in how the process starts. Traditionally, paper petitions are circulated and signatures are gathered before seeking a member to sponsor the petition in the Assembly. E-petitions first require sponsorship by a member; who will then lodge the proposed terms of the petition with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. Once the petition has been

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assessed to ensure it meets the requirements set out in the standing orders it will be posted on the Assembly's website with a specified closing date. When the petition has closed a hard copy version will be produced and the Clerk will announce it in the Assembly.

TAKING ACTION

Once the petition has been presented to the Assembly, the Clerk will refer a copy to the relevant minister, for information and/or action. The minister must respond by lodging a reply with the Clerk which is announced at a later sitting of the Assembly (within three months). The petition is then kept with all other papers presented to the Assembly that day. Petitions inform the government and all members of the Assembly about public opinion and highlight particular concerns that members of the ACT community might have.

A sample petition format is available on the Assembly website.

