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# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF SASKATCHEWAN

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## PRACTICAL GUIDE TO PETITIONS

SEPTEMBER 2020

## **Introduction**

A citizen's right to petition parliament is a centuries-old tradition, first exercised in England, that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan inherited along with its parliamentary system of government. A petition is a request from an individual or a group of individuals to a parliament or legislature for some action.

Each year, a variety of petitions addressing public policy issues or personal grievances are presented, on behalf of citizens, by MLAs (Member of the Legislative Assembly) to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. Although a petition is one of the most direct ways for the public to communicate with the Legislative Assembly, all petitions must be presented to the Legislative Assembly by one of its members.

Petitions must contain original signatures and addresses written directly onto the petition. Electronic submissions are not permitted.

This guide summarizes the information required by citizens so they may exercise their right to petition the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan.

## **Form and Content of a Petition**

There is a prescribed form to a petition, containing traditional language and phrases. The form and content of a petition must meet the following criteria to be received by the Legislative Assembly:

### **Addressee**

Petitions must be clearly and respectfully addressed to one of the following:

- the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan;
- the Government of Saskatchewan;
- a Minister of the Crown; or
- a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

### **Subject matter**

The subject matter of the petition consists of two parts: the grievance and the prayer.

The grievance summarizes the reason the petition is being presented to the Assembly and the problem it wishes to address. It may include any background information that is necessary or useful in understanding why the petition is being made. The format for the grievance is outlined below:

We, the undersigned residents of the Province of Saskatchewan, wish to bring to your attention the following:

(Briefly summarize the problem or grievance and any necessary background information).

The prayer outlines the action the petitioner would like the addressee to take in response to the grievance. It should contain a clear request for a remedy for the grievance that is within the legislative competence of the Assembly or that is within the jurisdiction of the province of Saskatchewan to grant, such as to amend a law or obtain a change in government policy. Petitions that address matters within the purview of the federal government or which have been delegated to another body will be ruled out of order and not received. The prayer may call for the expenditure or grant of public funds or for a charge on the public revenue. The format for the prayer is outlined in the example below:

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan to

(Outline the actions to be taken to address the grievance).

The subject matter of the petition must be expressed in temperate language in English or French. Offensive or inflammatory language will not be accepted.

## **Signatures**

The petition must contain at least three original signatures from persons other than MLAs who are residents of the province of Saskatchewan. The signatures and addresses of petitioners must be written directly on the petition and not pasted or otherwise attached or transferred to the petition. A photocopy, facsimile, or an electronic version is not acceptable.

There is no minimum age requirement for anyone signing a petition.

## **Paper**

Petitions must be written, typewritten, or printed on paper of usual size and must be free from partisan graphics. Original signatures and addresses must be written directly onto the petition. Electronic submissions will not be accepted.

The subject matter and prayer are required on each page if the submission contains more than one sheet of signatures and addresses. To ensure that the text of the petition is not altered after the signatures have been inscribed, no additions, alterations or erasures are permitted on any part of the petition. These measures ensure that the petitioners are in agreement with the grievance and prayer of the petition..

## Sample petition

A model petition is provided below. It can be found in Appendix 3 of the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan*.

### Petition to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

We, the undersigned residents of the Province of Saskatchewan, wish to bring to your attention the following:

*(Briefly summarize the problem or grievance and any necessary background information)*

We, in the prayer that reads as follows, respectfully request that the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan:

*(Outline the action the Legislative Assembly is being asked to take or not to take)*

Name (print)

Address (print)

Signature

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*Please note: The name and address of the persons who sign this petition may be made available to the public if the petition is in proper form to be presented to the Legislative Assembly.*

## Presenting Petitions to the Legislative Assembly

Citizens do not possess the right to address the Legislative Assembly directly. Instead, their petitions must be dated, endorsed (i.e. signed), and presented by an MLA.

### Finding a sponsoring MLA

Citizens wishing to have their petition presented to the Legislative Assembly must first find an MLA willing to sponsor their petition. MLAs are not required to present a petition on a citizen's behalf, and no recourse exists against one who refuses to do so. In finding a sponsor, petitioners often seek out an MLA supportive of the action outlined in the prayer (e.g., one from the area

affected by the grievance or with a personal or professional interest in the subject matter of the petition); however, an MLA does not need to support the petition in order to present it. There are instances where MLAs have presented petitions with which they disagree.

A list of all MLAs, including links to their contact information, can be found on the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan website at <https://www.legassembly.sk.ca/mlas/>.

## **Presenting petitions**

Petitions may be presented to the Legislative Assembly in one of two ways. In the first, an MLA may choose to orally present a petition during a sitting of the Legislative Assembly at the time specified for presenting petitions. The MLA will read the prayer and briefly indicate the localities in which the petitioners reside. Only one petition per subject matter may be presented in this manner per day, and an MLA may present only one petition orally per day. No debate will occur in relation to the petition.

Alternately, an MLA may choose to present a petition by submitting it to a Clerk-at-the-Table during any sitting of the Assembly except on the last day of a legislative session. There is no limit placed on the number of petitions which may be submitted per day in this manner.

## **Reading and receiving petitions**

Once a petition has been presented, it will be reviewed by the Clerks-at-the-Table. If it is found to be in order, it will be formally recorded as “read and received” the following day in the *Votes and Proceedings*, which is the official record of the Assembly. If the petition is not found to be in order, the Clerk will advise the Assembly that the petition shall not be received, and it will be rejected and returned to the MLA who presented it.

## **Government response**

The government may choose to provide a written response to any petition that has been read and received by the Legislative Assembly, but it is under no obligation to do so. A response may be submitted to the Clerks-at-the-Table on any sitting day during the session that the petition is read and received, and it is recorded as part of the sessional record in the *Votes and Proceedings*.

## **Petitions are public documents**

Once a petition has been read and received, it becomes a sessional paper and is considered a public document. It will be retained in the sessional records of the Legislative Assembly and subsequently form part of the historical archives of the province. All petitions that have been read and received, including the names of those who have signed them, may be examined by the public in the Office of the Clerk. Please contact (306) 787-0603 for further information.

## **Extract from the *Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan***

- Filing of petitions      **16(1)** A petition to the Assembly may be submitted by a Member at any time during the sitting of the Assembly by filing it at the Table. More than one petition may be filed during a sitting.
- Oral presentation      **16(2)** Any Member desiring to present a petition from his or her place in the Assembly may do so during Routine Proceedings at the period designated Presenting Petitions.
- No debate permitted      **16(3)** The period for Presenting Petitions is subject to the following conditions:  
(a) The period is not to exceed one hour.  
(b) No debate on any matter on or in relation to the petitions is permitted.  
(c) A Member will be recognized only once to present a petition.  
(d) No more than one petition on a subject may be presented during the period.  
(e) The Member may read the prayer, provide a general explanation of the subject matter and location of the petitioners.
- Form of petition      **16(4)** The form and content of every petition shall:  
(a) be addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, the Government of Saskatchewan, a Minister of the Crown or a Member of the Assembly;  
(b) contain a clear, proper and respectful prayer in reference to matters within the legislative competence of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan or the jurisdiction of the Government of Saskatchewan;  
(c) be proper for the prayer to call for the expenditure of public funds;  
(d) be written, typewritten or printed on paper of usual size;  
(e) be free of alterations and interlineations in its text;  
(f) have its subject matter and prayer indicated on every sheet if it consists of more than one sheet of signatures and addresses;  
(g) contain only original signatures and addresses written directly onto the petition and not pasted thereon or otherwise transferred to it;  
(h) contain at least three signatures from persons other than Members of the Legislative Assembly who are residents of the Province of Saskatchewan and, where the signatories have a fixed place of residence, their addresses; and  
(i) not contain partisan graphics.
- Responsibility for content      **16(5)** Members who present or file a petition shall be answerable that they do not contain impertinent or improper matter.
- Endorsement of petitions      **16(6)** Every Member presenting a petition shall endorse his or her name thereon.
- Reading and receiving      **16(7)** The Clerk shall examine the form and content of all petitions. On the sitting day following the presentation or filing of a petition, the Clerk shall report on the same if it

is irregular or contains a matter in breach of the privileges of the Assembly. If no such report be made, the petition shall then be deemed to be permitted to be read and received.

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| Recording of petitions                                      | <b>16(8)</b> Petitions that are read and received shall be recorded in the <i>Votes and Proceedings</i> as a sessional paper.  |
| No petitions on Completion Day                              | <b>16(9)</b> Petitions shall not be presented or filed on Completion Day of the parliamentary calendar.  |
| Government may respond to petition                          | <b>17(1)</b> The government may provide a written response to any petition that has been read and received. A response to a petition may be made on any sitting day during the session that the petition is read and received. |
| Response to be tabled and recorded in Votes and Proceedings | <b>17(2)</b> Responses to petitions shall be laid on the Table at the designated time after Routine Proceedings. The response shall be recorded as part of the sessional record in the <i>Votes and Proceedings</i> .          |