



Legislative Council

5 February 2026

Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into the Standing Orders relating to petitions

Thank you for the invitation to make a submission to your committee inquiry into the standing orders relating to petitions.

Victorians have had the ability to petition the Parliament since the first Legislative Council was established in 1851. Until 2017, standing orders on petitions remained relatively unchanged in essence except for language modernisation in the 1990s. In the last 10 years, the Legislative Council's Procedure Committee has conducted an inquiry into the introduction of e-petitions and a general Standing Order review of petition processes. The Committee proposed recommendations that led to the House making changes to processes.

Inquiry into E-Petitions

In June 2016, the House agreed to a motion amending standing orders to allow electronic petitions to be presented in the Council. The Procedure Committee took a minimalistic approach, providing for the existing Standing Orders for petitions to also apply to e-petitions. Alongside these changes, the Procedure Committee's Report included some administrative and technical processes by way of a practice note, to be read in conjunction with the Standing Orders.

The proposed changes were adopted as Standing Orders in March 2017 and came onto effect upon the e-petition system going live on the parliamentary website.

Standing Order review

The Procedure Committee conducted a broad review of the standing orders in 2022 which included proposed changes to petition processes. The House made the changes recommended by the Committee which came into effect on the first day of the 60th Parliament (December 2022). Many of the changes strengthened and consolidated existing standing orders with the addition of new requirements.

Content of petitions (SO 11.01)

The Table Office team reviews e-petition submissions for compliance with standing orders.

Previously adopted practice of the Council was that matters raised in petitions must be within state administration as the Clerk was required to refer the petition to the relevant minister. This meant that petition requests relating to the procedures of the Council were rejected as these matters were outside the responsibilities of a ministerial portfolio. Standing orders now outline that the action or remedy sought must be within the responsibilities of state administration or relate to the procedures of the Council (these matters are referred to the Leader of the Government in the Council).

Staff also make minor edits to petition requests including grammar, structure and format with approval from the principal petitioner. To assist this process the following changes were made to standing orders:

- Language changes:

<i>Previous SO's</i>	<i>New SO's</i>	<i>Reasoning</i>
10.02 Content of petitions A petition will be legible	11.01 Content of petitions (1) A petition must be legible and clear	'clear' was added to clarify what is meant by 'legible'
(4) Be respectful and temperate in its language.	(e) be respectful and moderate in language;	'temperate' was replaced with 'moderate' to provide greater meaning

- A requirement that petitions not include irrelevant statements was included to avoid allegations being made that are not relevant to the grievance.
- Clarification that petitions should avoid unnecessary naming individuals or contain information that could lead to the identification of any individual with the exception of elected representatives or public figures (as allegations against an individual pose a risk and challenge procedural fairness when published on the parliament's website).

Signing a petition (SO 11.02)

Although a petition must be addressed to the Legislative Council and indicate the number of Victorians that think a certain action should be taken, there was no standing order that expressly identified who could sign a petition. Standing orders now clarify that signatories must be a Victorian resident and that they may only sign a petition once. Non-Victorian signatories are not accepted by our e-petition platform and their presence on a paper petition does not invalidate the petition, they are simply excluded from the final signature tally.

Tabling a petition (SO 11.03) and process following the presentation (SO 11.04) including petition debates

Petitions are tabled in the House by a sponsoring member. The member acts as a conduit between the community and the House. An additional statement was added to the standing orders to make it clear that the presentation of a petition by a member does not signify their agreement with the issue.

Prior to the standing order review, the Clerk was required to refer a copy of the terms of every tabled petition to the relevant minister. However, no further action was required. The minister was not required to provide a response, matters were not referred to a relevant committee, nor was there a debate automatically triggered if a signature threshold was met. A member could move at the time of tabling ‘That a petition be taken into consideration’. If agreed to, the petition would be listed on the Notice Paper as an Order of the Day to be brought on for debate on a future day. Although members often listed petitions, they were rarely debated (the last time a petition was debated using this Standing Order was in 2014).

Standing orders now require the responsible minister or Leader of the Government to respond in writing (within 30 days) to all petitions referred to them by the Clerk (petition responses are published at the time they are received and tabled in the House on the next sitting day).

A major change to the standing orders has been to provide for an opportunity for petitions to be debated. If a petition has obtained a certain number of signatures (2,000 for paper petitions and 10,000 for mixed or e-petitions) a 30 minute debate may proceed on a Wednesday afternoon.

During the current parliamentary term (since December 2022), a total of 173 petitions have been tabled in the Council (57 paper, 104 e-petitions and 12 mixed). Despite the accessibility of e-petitions there has been a notable increase in the number of paper petitions tabled, possibly due to the lower signature threshold required to qualify for debate. Of these petitions, 144 have received a written response. There is currently no formal mechanism for members to follow up overdue responses in the House.

Every sitting Wednesday in 2025 there was a petition debated in the time allocated for ‘Petitions (qualifying for debate). Following each debate, a question is put, ‘That the petition be taken into consideration’. A total of 31 petitions have been debated this parliamentary term, the largest bearing

43,748 signatures. These debates have often seen an increase in attendance in the public galleries.

Overview of petitions this parliamentary term

	2023	2024	2025
Petitions tabled	27	68	78
Petition signatures	39,947	108,761	242,845
Responses received	17	55	72
Petitions debated	2	12	17

E-petitions (SO 11.05)

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic the Table Office team processed large volumes of petition requests (with the largest number received in a single day being 33). Often these requests were identical or similar to an existing live petition. Although it was suggested that the requester support an existing petition, they exercised their right to have their own petition posted. This led to the inclusion of an additional standing order to consolidate support for an issue denoting that e-petitions the same in substance cannot be open for signing at any one time.

E-petitions must be posted for a minimum of one week and a maximum of six months from the date of publication. At the conclusion of the posted period an extension can be requested for up to a maximum of six months. The words ‘the initial posted period’ were included to prevent petitions continuously being extended and remaining open but never being tabled.

Petition platform and emerging technology

The Legislative Council currently use the Parliamentary Information Management System (PIMs) to facilitate the e-petition process. This e-petition module was launched along with new webpages that directly integrated with the PIMs system in late September 2023. Prior to this, the Department used a Joomla Content Management System to facilitate e-petitions.

The design of the new system and web pages allowed for the inclusion of solutions to previous challenges faced in the e-petition space including —

- blank requests - the action and grievance must now contain text to continue with a submission;
- the form only accepts Victorian addresses (excluding PO boxes) – the system uses Google maps, however, this does cause issues for those in new estates that are yet to be mapped or those who do not have a fixed address; and

- identical signatories – if a petitioner tries to sign a petition multiple times with identical information the additional signature is not accepted; variations are still captured but are removed during the manual signature validation process.

The Council is yet to consider the implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) in the petition process. However, the Table Office team has observed an increase in e-petition requests drafted using AI generators such as ChatGPT or that have used information obtained from an AI assistant such as Google AI Overviews. This has created additional work for them as these requests are often poorly written, and the team needs to redraft them to meet the requirements in the Standing Orders that the petition request is clear.

Form and template

The Council accepts e-petitions submitted through our website and paper petitions that comply with our rules. Petitions hosted on other platforms such as Change.org are not accepted.

All petitions must be addressed to the Legislative Council, and need to contain a grievance and action in relation to a matter within state administration or procedures of the Council.

Both the [e-petition form](#) and the [paper petition template](#) contain the following template preambles as a starting point for petitioners:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council...

The Petitioners therefore request that...

Although a paper petition template is available, its use is not necessary for a paper petition to be valid.

Data and privacy

When a principal petitioner lodges a request to start an e-petition, their name, contact number, residential address and email address are collected. When an individual signs an e-petition, their name and residential address are collected. For paper petitions a name, residential address and signature is required. Other information is often collected with paper petitions including contact number and email addresses. We request that this information is removed before tabling as it is not required under the rules for a valid signature and will become public information once the petition is presented in the House.

This information is confidential until the petition is tabled in the House except for the principal petitioner's email (e-petitions only), which is posted along with their petition on parliament's website. Once tabled a petition is

considered a public document. The original hard copy is included in the Original Papers, which are held on the parliamentary precinct for the current and next parliamentary term. After this time, they are publicly accessible at the Public Records of Victoria. The Table Office will provide a digital copy of a petition on request.

If an e-petition remains unsponsored 12 months after the closing date, all signatory data is deleted. Limited data is retained by the Table Office for petition statistics. This is also true for e-petition rejections, those not proceeding or that are awaiting final response from the principal petitioner.

The fact that petition data, once tabled, becomes available publicly (albeit not published publicly) has caused some concern among members of the community, causing them to redact their initial support for a petition. A signature can be removed from a petition as long as the petition has not been tabled. Most requests have been from signatories who did not realise petitions are public documents once tabled. These requests primarily come from individuals signing e-petitions despite the requirement to agree to the [petitions privacy statement](#) prior to submitting their support for a petition. This same privacy statement also applies to paper petitions, however the onus is on the signatories to familiarise themselves with this policy before signing a petition. It is not a requirement for the principal petitioner to circulate this statement with the petition.

In summary, the Legislative Council has made a number of reforms to its petition processes over the last decade to enhance community engagement, Parliamentary debate and Government responses to petitions. Further refinements to processes are constantly being reviewed, particularly in relation to addressing the impact of emerging technologies.

I hope this information is of use to the committee. If you require any further information, don't hesitate to contact me.

Regards,

Robert McDonald
Clerk of the Legislative Council
Parliament of Victoria