



## **Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria**

### **Submission to the Standing Committee on Petitions inquiry into the standing orders relating to petitions**

The Legislative Assembly's procedures for petitions are relatively new. After being trialled by way of a sessional order this Parliament and last, the House adopted new standing orders in late 2025. In adopting rules for petitions, the House took the approach that, so far as practical, the rules for paper petitions and e-petitions should be the same. Therefore, the standing orders refer to 'petitions' generally, and only specify paper petitions or e-petitions where processes necessarily differ.

The requirements for paper petitions and e-petitions presented to the Legislative Assembly are set out in [Standing Orders 44- 52](#). These rules and practices are in place to establish the authenticity of petitions, and to ensure the protection of the petitioner and the House. Petitions that do not comply with the rules cannot be presented. To help members and petitioners ensure their petitions conform to the requirements, the Department of the Legislative Assembly has published a [guide](#).

### **Format and content of petitions**

[Standing Order 45](#) states:

- (1) A petition must:
  - (a) be legible;
  - (b) be addressed to the Legislative Assembly of Victoria;
  - (c) include:
    - (i) a description of the petitioners;
    - (ii) the petition issue; and
    - (iii) the action or remedy sought from the House.
- (2) A petition must not have supporting material attached to it.
- (3) A petition may request an action or remedy that has been sought by another petition, however e-petitions may not simultaneously request the same action or remedy.
- (4) Once published, an e-petition cannot be altered.

### **Language requirements**

[Standing Order 46](#) states petitions must be:

- (1) In English or accompanied by an English translation certified to be true and correct by the sponsoring member.

(2) In respectful and temperate language.

### **Language requirements**

Petitions must be in English or accompanied by an English translation certified to be true and correct by the sponsoring member. Petitions must use respectful and temperate language.

### **Signatures on petitions**

Under [Standing Order 44](#), **sign** means a petitioner:

- (1) signing a paper petition; or
- (2) electronically providing their name and address and signifying their intention to join an e-petition; or
- (3) if incapable of signing, another person signing on their behalf; or
- (4) if a corporation, adding the corporation's common seal.

Under [Standing Order 47](#):

- (1) Petitions must contain at least one signature.
- (2) Petitions may only be signed by Victorian residents.
- (3) Paper petitions must:
  - (a) contain the original signatures, names and addresses of the petitioners;
  - (b) state the terms of the petition, as required under SO 45(1)(c), on the top of every sheet of signatures;
  - (c) not contain signatures that have been pasted or in any other way transferred or attached to the petition.
- (4) It is a breach of privilege of the House for a person to add the name of any other person to a petition, except as provided for under SO 44.

### **Sponsoring petitioner**

Under [Standing Order 44](#), a sponsoring petitioner refers to the person who initiates an e-petition.

### **Sponsoring Member**

[Standing Order 44](#) defines a sponsoring member as the member in whose name the petition is presented to the House.

Only a member of the Legislative Assembly can present a petition in the House. Any member can be contacted by petitioners, whether they are the local member of the group/individual or not. The member signs at the top of the first page of the petition to show they are presenting it. This is not the same as signing as a petitioner and does not mean the member agrees with its contents.

Members routinely present petitions they do not necessarily support — they are effectively the petitioners' conduit to the House.

In practice, a principal petitioner for an e-petition must ask the Clerk's office to review a proposed e-petition prior to collecting signatures, because it is hosted on Parliament's website. This means that potential problems of admissibility with petitions can be picked up and resolved at the outset. This is obviously not the case with paper petitions, but our office welcomes the opportunity to check the admissibility of proposed paper petitions for members or constituents before signatures are collected.

When signatures have been collected on a paper petition the petitioners provide the petition to the member, who then gives the petition to the Clerk for tabling. In the case of e-petitions, the Clerk prepares the petition for tabling as soon as possible after it closes. In both cases, the Clerk sends the relevant minister a copy of the front sheet of the petition, showing the issue raised and the total number of signatures. The minister may choose to respond to the petition in some way but is not obliged to.

[Standing Order 49](#) states that:

- (1) The sponsoring member must examine the petition to ensure that it is not offensive in its language or tone, and that it complies with the rules of the House.
- (2) A member must not table a petition they have signed as a signatory.
- (3) For paper petitions, the sponsoring member must:
  - a. (a) sign the top of the front page;
  - b. (b) give the petition to the Clerk at least one day before the sitting of the House at which it is to be presented.
- (4) For e-petitions, the sponsoring member:
  - (a) must nominate a period (the posted period) that the e-petition will be published and:
    - (i) the posted period must be a minimum of one week and a maximum of six months from the date of publication;
    - (ii) if the Assembly is due to expire under s 38(1) of the *Constitution Act 1975* within six months from the date of publication, the Clerk will determine the maximum posted period;
    - (iii) the sponsoring member may request that the Clerk change the posted period before it ends, provided the maximum period is not exceeded.
  - (b) may request that the Clerk withdraw the petition.

### **The Clerk's role in petitions:**

[Standing order 50](#) states the Clerk must:

- (1) Before a paper petition is presented, review the petition to ensure it conforms with the standing orders and procedures of the House.
- (2) Before the e-petition is published:
  - (a) review the wording of the e-petition to ensure it conforms with standing orders and procedures of the House;
  - (b) confirm that the sponsoring member has agreed to sponsor the petition.
- (3) After the posted period for an e-petition has ended, arrange for the petition to be presented under SO 51 on the next sitting day.

### **Presenting a petition**

The Clerk announces the name of the member presenting the petition, its subject matter and the number of signatures. The only questions that the House can consider are 'That the petition is tabled' and 'That it be taken in consideration' on a stated future day. These details are printed in the *Votes and Proceedings* and in *Hansard*.

[Standing Order 51](#) states a petition may be presented in

- (1) Formal business:
  - (a) the Clerk will present the petition and read the name of the sponsoring member, a summary of the action or remedy sought, and the number of signatures;
  - (b) the Chair proposes the question 'that the petition be tabled'; and
  - (c) the terms of the petition must be printed in *Hansard*; or
- (2) Statements by members under SO 40 — the sponsoring member will present the petition and read the terms of the petition and the number of signatures and give the petition to the Clerk.

I understand that the Committee is considering the effect of emerging technologies, such as AI, on the integrity of the petitions process, and other administrative steps to maintain credibility of the process. The verification steps set out in SO 44(2) for e-petitions are an important tool in supporting the integrity of e-petitions, as is the manual check of all petitions by the Clerk's Office prior

to tabling. Having the petitions hosted on Parliament's website is another safeguard.

As the Assembly's petitions system is fairly new, I will watch the Committee's inquiry with interest, as I am sure the Committee's work will be of benefit to many jurisdictions. I wish the Committee well with its work.

Please contact me with any queries on \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_

Bridget Noonan

Clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria