

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN A SENATE COMMITTEE STUDY

ORAL AND WRITTEN EVIDENCE

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Senate committees regularly invite individuals, experts, groups and organizations, lobbyists, public servants and ministers of the Crown to appear before them as witnesses to receive information relevant to a bill they are considering or a special study they are undertaking. There are two ways to participate in a committee’s study: by giving oral evidence (testimony) or by submitting a brief (written evidence).

How do you participate in a committee’s study?

What is a written evidence?

Written evidence submitted to a committee (whether from an individual or from an organization) is commonly referred to as a brief. A brief may provide opinions, comments and recommendations on a subject being studied by a Senate committee. A brief can be in the form of an executive summary, a short essay, a letter or other presentation format.

What should be included in a brief?

- the name of the individual or organization submitting the brief;
- the name of the Senate committee to whom the brief is being submitted;
- a summary of your main points;
- opinions supported by facts (briefs should generally not exceed 10 pages, and in cases where this is not feasible, a one-page executive summary should be provided); and
- any specific recommendations or proposed amendments that you would like the committee to consider.

Submitting a brief

Anyone wishing to submit written evidence may do so in either official language. However, briefs are normally circulated to committee members once they are available in both official languages. The committee clerk can coordinate translation for you if you do not have access to translation services. **Once translated, these documents are distributed to committee members and become part of the public records of the committee and may be posted on the committee website.**

Briefs should be submitted electronically to the clerk of the committee. You can find the contact information for committee clerks on the [Senate Committees web site](#), in the section “Contact/About” for each committee. Briefs may be submitted in one of the following formats: Word, PowerPoint or PDF¹.

Please ensure that your written evidence contains no confidential or sensitive personal information. Personal contact information should only be given in the email which accompanies the brief and not in the document or title page. Any personal contact information may be redacted from the brief itself.

¹ Please note PowerPoint slides cannot be shown on a screen during a committee meeting. All documents sent to the committee clerk in advance are sent to committee members electronically and hard copies can be made available at the meeting once translations are available.

Translation and other useful information

If you are appearing as a witness and want your brief to be distributed to committee members, you should submit it to the committee clerk **well before** your appearance and leave enough time for the document to be translated. Translation time depends on the number of words and the overall workload of the Translation Bureau. In general, you should allow one business day for every 2,000 words to be translated.

In order to facilitate translation, it is strongly recommended that you submit your brief electronically in an editable format (e.g., Word or PowerPoint) and that you include the original file used to generate any images or figures. Only documents prepared specifically for the committee's study are considered to be briefs and will be translated and published. Journal or newspaper articles or other publications (i.e. annual reports) may be circulated to committee members for information purposes, at the committee's discretion, however these documents will not be considered part of the official evidence collected by the committee.

It should be noted that any briefs submitted to a House of Commons committee are not automatically transferred to Senate committees. Briefs must be addressed and submitted to the appropriate Senate committee to be included in the committee's official evidence. If you are submitting a brief to a Senate committee that has previously been submitted to the House of Commons, please inform the committee clerk.

CHECKLIST FOR PREPARING AN EFFECTIVE BRIEF

- ✓ State the facts and give specific examples
- ✓ Be as concise as possible; ideally, your brief should be five to 10 pages
- ✓ Make recommendations as precise as possible
- ✓ Provide a summary of your conclusions and recommendations
- ✓ Reread your brief carefully to make sure it outlines your key messages?
- ✓ Clearly indicate your organization's mandate (if applicable)

Appearing before a committee

Individuals or groups interested in a study being carried out by a committee may make a request to appear before that committee. They are invited to send their request to the committee clerk.

Committees select witnesses based on several criteria including their knowledge of the subject matter, their national or regional interests and availability. As committees have a limited amount of time available to conduct their work, they may not be able to hear the

testimony of all those who wish to appear. However, interested parties still have the option of submitting a brief while the study is ongoing.

Once the committee decides who will be invited to appear, the committee clerk will contact potential witnesses with a confirmation of the date, time and place of the meeting. Under some circumstances, a committee may agree to pay for reasonable travelling and living expenses. A witness wishing to seek such financial assistance must consult with the clerk of the committee prior to their appearance, as travel expense claims are subject to certain guidelines and the approval of the committee. Additional information on appearing before a committee can be found on the committee’s website “[For witnesses](#)”.

If you are invited to appear before the committee virtually or by videoconference, the instructions and confirmation details sent to you by the committee clerk should be closely reviewed prior to the meeting. You are also invited to consult the guide “[Best practices for videoconferencing](#)”.

Other useful information for preparing a brief or testimony

To help you prepare your testimony or brief, visit the [committee’s website](#), which provides the following information:

- the committee’s mandate;
- the members of the committee;
- the orders of reference which describe all bills and studies before the committee;
- meeting information for past and upcoming hearings; and
- the transcripts and videos of previous meetings.

Oral evidence

Prior to the hearing:

- provide a copy of your speaking notes (even handwritten notes) to the committee clerk before your appearance. These notes will not be distributed to committee members, unless you wish for them to be, but they are essential for ensuring quality interpretation and real-time transcription;
- provide the committee clerk with the name, title and contact information of all those appearing as witnesses; and
- contact the committee clerk if you have any questions regarding your appearance.

On the day of the hearing:

- please arrive or log-in at least 30 minutes before you are scheduled to appear;
- bring valid photo ID for the security check upon arrival;
- provide at least one printed copy of your speaking notes (ideally five copies) to the committee clerk upon your arrival at the meeting or send electronically before your appearance;

- speak clearly and at a moderate pace, as your words are being both interpreted and transcribed in real time; and
- committee members may ask you questions following your presentation.

After the hearing:

- send any additional or requested information for the committee to the committee clerk;
- correct the unrevised transcript of your testimony, which will be sent to you after your appearance (you have 48 hours to provide your comments); and
- submit your travel claim to the committee clerk within 60 days of your appearance, if applicable.

What can you expect at a committee meeting?

Witnesses are encouraged to introduce themselves to the committee clerk when they arrive at the committee room. The committee clerk will explain the format and answer any questions the witness may have.

The chair is a senator elected by the members of the committee to preside over its meetings. The chair maintains order and decorum, recognizes members to speak, and rules on questions of procedure. The committee chair will gavel in the meeting and typically makes brief introductory remarks to introduce the senators and witnesses and indicate the order in which witnesses will be heard.

Opening statements by witnesses are followed by a question and answer period with the members of the committee. Statements should be kept short. Each committee sets its own guidelines for questioning witnesses. If you have prepared a brief, avoid reading long passages. Your opening statement will have more impact if you summarize the key points and emphasize your recommendations.

All witnesses have the right to address a committee in either official language. If the proceedings are televised, closed captioning may be provided for the hearing-impaired. To create an accurate record, the interpreters and stenographers request that witnesses speak clearly and at a reasonable speed, particularly when reading short sentences from briefs, quotations and other documents.

The Senate has adopted a scent-free work environment. Witnesses are requested to refrain from using scented products.

For legislative studies (bills or subject-matter studies):

- The order of reference for legislative studies are usually narrow in scope, and focus on the principle, possible effects and specific provisions of the bill.
- Clearly state your organization’s position on the bill: do you support the bill, support it in principle but with concerns, or do you reject the bill?
- Proposed amendments should refer to specific provisions in the bill.

Tools for understanding bills:

LEGISinfo is an online database which provides important information of all legislation that is before Parliament. On *LEGISinfo* you will find:

- the full text of a bill;
- the major speeches in Parliament in relation to a bill;
- all committee testimony and debate in both chambers in relation to a bill;
- a legislative summary of all government bills (these help explain the provisions of a bill in plain language); and
- government news releases and backgrounders.

CHECKLIST FOR DELIVERING EFFECTIVE TESTIMONY

- ✓ Review the [order of reference](#) for the committee’s study
- ✓ Consider the [testimony](#) the committee has already heard
- ✓ Clearly identify your key messages
- ✓ Respect the time allotted to you for your opening remarks
- ✓ End your testimony with a strong conclusion
- ✓ Leave out background, secondary and technical information – include it in a [brief](#) instead

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

- Visit the committee’s website, which you can access from the Senate of Canada’s website: <https://sencanada.ca/en>
- Contact the committee clerk using the contact information listed in the “Contact / About” section on the committee’s website
- Additional resources for witnesses are available here: <https://sencanada.ca/en/Committees/ForWitnesses>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a Senate committee?

Senate committees perform work referred to them by the Senate through what is called an order of reference. Committees study proposed legislation, bills and government expenditures (the estimates) and conduct special studies. When a committee has completed its work, or a part thereof, it presents its findings, recommendations or decisions in the form of a report to the Senate.

Committee work is important because it gives senators an opportunity to examine in detail the subject under review. This examination process usually includes hearings which allow senators to question groups and individuals on their views.

There are two main types of committees: standing committees permanently established by the *Rules of the Senate*, and special committees appointed to study a specific order of reference. Committees can establish subcommittees as necessary. In addition, the Senate and the House of Commons can create standing joint committees or special joint committees.

Senate committees usually have from 9 to 15 members. Committee membership generally reflects the standings of the political parties and recognized parliamentary groups in the Senate itself.

What is an order of reference?

An order of reference is the parliamentary term for a task referred to a committee by the Senate. A committee's order of reference may be:

- a major investigation into a broad policy issue;
- the detailed study of proposed legislation after second reading; or
- the study of a specific subject, such as the study of the subject matter of a bill.

The committee is bound by the terms of its order of reference, which sets the mandate of the committee and, in the case of special studies, the date it must report back to the Senate. Committees often have more than one order of reference at a time.

When a committee receives an order of reference, it is authorized to invite individuals and organizations to submit briefs or to testify before it. It may also hold hearings outside of Ottawa.

Who is your contact person?

The clerk of the committee is responsible for providing procedural advice and performing administrative duties for the committee. The committee clerk takes direction from members of the committee.

The committee clerk is a permanent, non-partisan employee of the Senate. They provide advice about procedure, administrative policies and the work of the committee, and you may direct any questions to them.

How do you obtain information about a Senate committee or one of its studies?

Individuals may request that they be added to the electronic mailing list for one or more committees to receive meeting notices and unrevised transcripts of the meetings. Such a request may be made through the clerk of the committee.

What can you expect after a committee meeting?

Following the appearance of a witness, the committee clerk will send a copy of the unrevised transcripts of the meeting and will ask for any minor editorial corrections to be made in order to better ensure the accuracy of the verbatim records. These corrections must be submitted within 48 hours of the receipt of the unrevised transcripts of the meeting. These unrevised transcripts unedited verbatim of proceedings as they were taken, in the original spoken language. The fully translated and edited copy of the transcripts is posted on the committee's website within a few weeks of a hearing.

Witnesses will be asked to fill out a web-based witness survey to provide feedback on their experience as a witness and the services they received.

Are witnesses eligible for reimbursement of expenses?

A committee may agree to pay for some reasonable travelling and living expenses, which are subject to certain guidelines and approvals of the committee. Witnesses must consult the committee clerk before their appearance if they wish to be reimbursed for travel expenses.

Are there accommodations for persons with reduced mobility?

All parliamentary buildings and committee rooms are accessible and have entrances adapted for persons with reduced mobility. Washrooms and elevators in all Senate-occupied buildings can accommodate wheelchairs. If a witness requires further information, the committee clerk should be consulted.

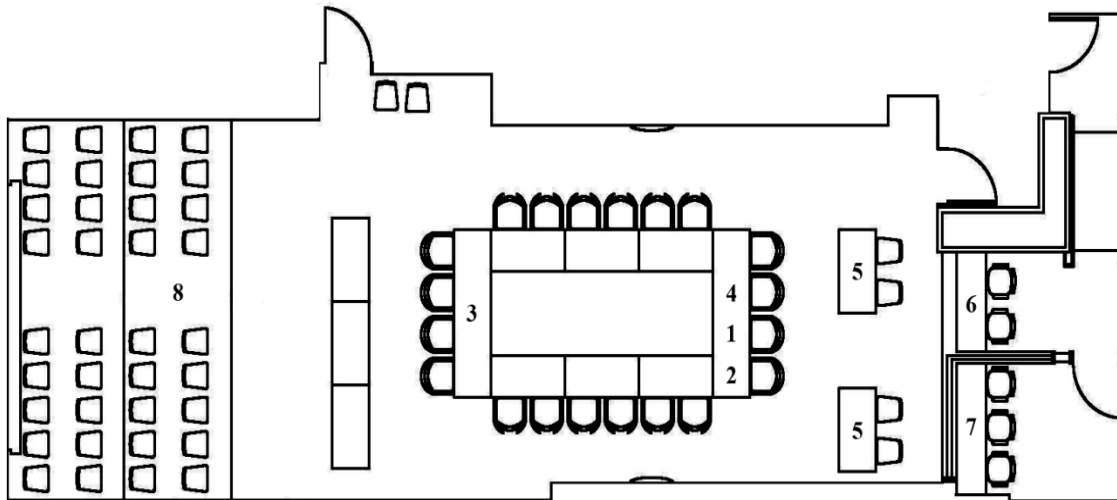
Is interpretation of committee proceedings available in languages other than English and French?

All committee proceedings are available in both official languages. If a witness requires interpretation in another language, including sign language, they must contact the committee clerk well in advance of the scheduled meeting date. While the Senate cannot guarantee the availability of an interpreter in a language other than English or French, when enough notice has been given it may be possible to provide interpretation in a third language. Please note that for hearings where interpretation is available in a third language, the committee's transcripts will only be published in the two official languages.

What is parliamentary privilege?

Since a committee's official meetings are a proceeding of Parliament, any person appearing before a Senate committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. In practical terms, this means that no legal action can be undertaken against a witness on the basis of what they say during a committee meeting. This privilege only extends to what is said during a meeting and not before the meeting begins or after it is over (adjourned).

Layout of a committee room



1. Chair
2. Clerk
3. Witnesses
4. Analysts
5. Parliamentary reporters
6. Technician and console operator
7. Interpreters
8. Audience

Map showing the public entrances to Senate buildings

