



PARTICIPATING IN A SENATE COMMITTEE STUDY

GIVING ORAL AND/OR WRITTEN EVIDENCE

February 2019

Committees regularly invite individuals, experts, groups and organizations, lobbyists, public servants and ministers of the Crown to appear before them as witnesses in order to receive information relevant to a study currently under consideration. An individual or organization can make a request to appear before a committee to give oral evidence on a particular study and/or may submit written evidence.

Detailed guidance for giving written or oral evidence is available at the end of this document. This section summarizes the main points.

Written evidence (commonly referred to as a “brief”)

Written evidence should consist of the following:

- name and contact information;
- sentence that directly addresses the committee the written evidence is submitted to;
- summary of the main points;
- factual information you would like to committee to be aware of (written evidence should generally not exceed 10 pages and in cases where this is not feasible, an executive summary should be provided);
- any specific recommendation that you would like the committee to consider including in its report.

If you are also appearing as a witness, written evidence should be submitted to the clerk at least one week before your presentation and may be provided in either official language. In order to facilitate translation, it is strongly recommended that written evidence be submitted electronically. Written evidence is made available to the public.

Oral evidence

Prior to the hearing:

- contact the clerk of the committee for any details regarding your appearance;
- if you intend to refer to speaking notes (even handwritten notes), it is recommended that these be provided to the clerk at least the day prior to your appearance – these will not be more widely distributed unless you wish them to be;
- as requested in the confirmation of appearance, the clerk must be provided with the name, title and contact information of those appearing.

On the day of the hearing:

- as the Senate has adopted Scent-Free Work Environment Guidelines, witnesses are requested to refrain from using scented products.
- please arrive at least 15 minutes before you are due to appear;
- bring picture identification;
- oral evidence should be concise as per the guidelines provided in your confirmation of appearance;
- if you plan to refer to speaking notes during your presentation (even handwritten notes) and have not previously submitted these to the clerk, you should provide 5 copies to the clerk upon your arrival at the meeting;
- you are asked to speak at a moderate pace as your words are being both interpreted and transcribed;
- a question and answer period will follow your presentation.

After the hearing:

- send any information you have undertaken to provide the committee to the clerk;
- correct the unrevised transcript of your testimony which will be sent to you by the clerk shortly after your appearance;
- submit your travel claim, if applicable, to the clerk at the latest within 60 days of your appearance.



What is a Senate Committee?

A committee performs work referred to it by the Senate through an order of reference. Committees study proposed legislation or bills, 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 types of select 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 groups in the Senate itself.

What is an Order of Reference?

An order of reference is the parliamentary term for a task delegated to a committee by the Senate. A committee's order of reference may be as all-encompassing as: (i) a major investigation into a broad policy issue; (ii) the detailed study of proposed legislation after second reading; or, (iii) the study of a specific subject matter such as the pre-study 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 standing committee receives an order of reference, it is authorized to invite persons to submit briefs or to testify before it. While much of the work of committees is done in Ottawa, committees may seek permission to travel for the purpose of holding hearings outside 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 clerk takes directions from members of the committee in conducting their work.

The clerk is a permanent employee of the Senate and is strictly non-partisan. He or she is knowledgeable about procedure and administrative policies and is the person to whom you should direct any questions.

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

To obtain information about a committee, it is recommended to contact the clerk of the committee or to visit the committee's website (www.sen.parl.gc.ca). It is possible for an individual to request that they be added to the committee's electronic mailing list to receive meeting notices and unrevised transcripts of the meetings. Such a request may be made through the clerk of the committee.

An individual or organization can make a request to appear before a committee on a particular study and/or may submit written evidence.

How do you participate in a committee's study?

a) Submitting written evidence ("brief")

Anyone wishing to submit written evidence (commonly referred to as a "brief") may do so in either official language. However, briefs are normally only circulated to members after they have been translated. Therefore, if appearing before a committee, any written material should be sent electronically to the clerk of the committee at least one week in advance of the presentation so that sufficient time is available for any translation and distribution. Written evidence is made available to the public.

b) Appearing before a committee

Committees regularly invite individuals, experts, groups and organizations, lobbyists, public servants and ministers of the Crown to appear before them in order to receive information relevant to the study currently under consideration. Individuals or groups interested in a study being carried out by a committee may make a request to appear before that committee.

Witnesses are selected based on a number of criteria, including the knowledge or interest of the witnesses and the amount of time available for the committee to conduct its work. Often, committees are unable to hear the testimony of all those who wish to appear. As stated above, committees will receive written briefs from any and all interested parties.

Once the committee decides who will be invited as a witness, the clerk will contact them, giving the date, time and place of the meeting.

What can you expect at a committee meeting?

As the Senate has adopted Scent-Free Work Environment Guidelines, witnesses are requested to refrain from using scented products.

Upon arrival at the committee room, it is suggested that witnesses introduce themselves to the committee clerk. The clerk will explain the format and answer any questions the witness may have.

At the outset of the meeting, the chair indicates the order in which witnesses will be heard and introduces the witnesses to the committee. The chair is a senator elected from among 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.

Opening statements by witnesses should be kept short as per the guidelines provided in the confirmation of appearance, and are followed by a question and answer period with the members of the committee. Each committee sets its own guidelines for questioning witnesses.

All witnesses have the right to address any committee in either official language. The proceedings may be televised and, as an added service, closed captioning may be provided for the hearing-impaired public. To create an accurate record, the interpreters and parliamentary reporters request that witnesses speak clearly and at a reasonable speed, particularly when reading from briefs, quotations and other documents.

Parliamentary Privilege

Since official meetings of a committee are part of the proceedings 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 its adjournment.

What can you expect after a committee meeting?

Following the appearance of a witness, the clerk will send a copy of the unrevised transcripts of their testimony and will ask for any minor editorial corrections to the unrevised transcript of their testimony, in order to better ensure the accuracy of the verbatim records. These corrections should be submitted within 48 hours of the receipt of the transcripts of the meeting.

Witnesses are also sent a web-based witness survey to provide feedback on their experience as a witness and the services they received.

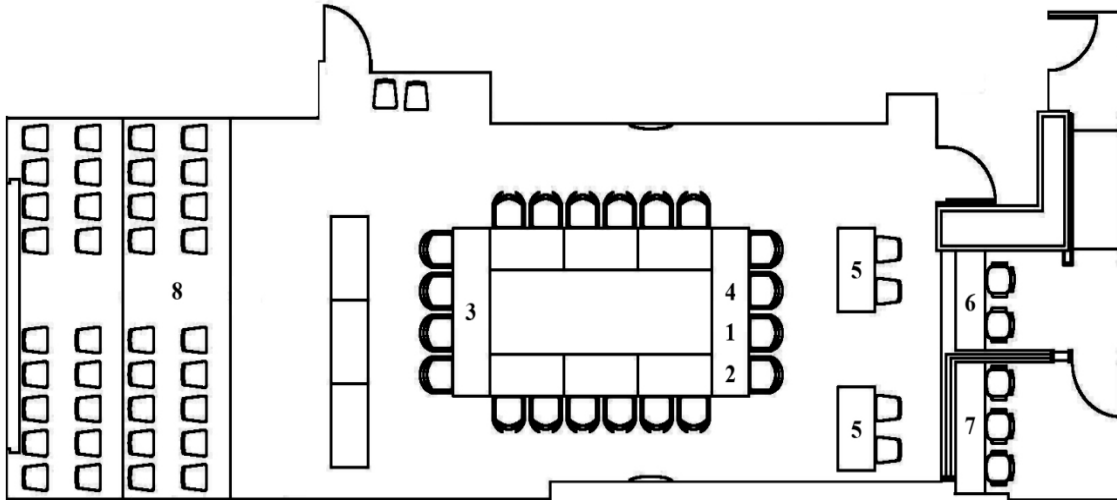
Are witnesses eligible for reimbursement of expenses?

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 the approval of the committee.

Are there facilities for the disabled?

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

Layout of a committee room



1. Chair
2. Clerk
3. Witnesses
4. Analyst
5. Parliamentary reporters
6. Room attendant
7. Interpreters
8. Audience

Map showing entrances to Senate Buildings

