

# **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?

### Submitting a brief

Anyone wishing to submit written evidence (commonly referred to as a "brief") may do so in either official language. However, briefs are normally circulated to committee members in both official languages only after they have been translated. The committee clerk<sup>1</sup> coordinates their translation. Once translated, these documents are made available to the public on the committee's website.

### What should be included in a brief?

- the name and contact information for the individual or organization submitting the brief;
- the name of the committee the brief is being submitted to;
- a summary of the 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 including in its report.

#### HOW TO ENSURE YOUR BRIEF IS EFFECTIVE

- State the facts and give specific examples
- Be as concise as possible; ideally, your brief will be five to 10 pages
- Make recommendations as precise as possible
- Provide a summary of your conclusions and recommendations
- Reread your brief carefully: is it consistent with your objectives, and does it outline your key messages?
- Clearly indicate your organization's mandate (if applicable)

<sup>1</sup> You can find the contact information for committee clerks on the [web page for each committee](#), in the section "Contact/About."

## 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 clerk 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<sup>2</sup>) 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. Some committees may agree to share scientific or newspaper articles or other publications with committee members for information purposes, but these documents will not be considered part of the official evidence collected by the committee.

Please note that if you submitted a brief to a House of Commons committee you must also submit it to the 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 to avoid having it translated twice.

## 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 a number of criteria including their knowledge of the subject matter, their interest and availability. As the committee must consider the amount of time available to conduct their work, they are often unable 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 clerk will contact them with the date, time and place of the meeting. While a committee may agree to pay for some travel expenses, witnesses must consult the clerk beforehand for approval and to receive [guidelines](#).

If you are invited to appear by videoconference, please review the instructions and confirmation details that will be sent to you by the clerk. You are also invited to consult the guide "[Best practices for videoconferencing](#)".

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<sup>2</sup> Please note that although senators appreciate the PowerPoint format, slides won't be shown on a screen during a committee meeting. All documents sent in advance are sent to committee members electronically and hard copies are made available at the meeting.

### HOW TO ENSURE YOUR TESTIMONY IS EFFECTIVE

- Read over the order of reference for the study in question
- Take into account what the committee has already heard
- Identify your key messages
- Respect the time allotted to you for your opening remarks
- End your testimony with a strong conclusion (likely to be quoted)
- Leave out secondary and technical information: include it in a brief instead

### 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 framework for the committee's studies;
- the upcoming meetings; and
- the transcripts of previous meetings.

### Oral evidence

#### *Prior to the hearing:*

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

#### *On the day of the hearing:*

- please arrive at least 30 minutes before you are scheduled to appear;
- bring picture identification for the security check upon arrival;
- provide at least one copy of your speaking notes (ideally five copies) to the clerk upon your arrival at the meeting;
- remember to speak at a moderate pace, as your words are being both interpreted and transcribed; and
- a question and answer period will follow your presentation.

*After the hearing:*

- send any additional or requested information for the committee to the 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 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 clerk will explain the format and answer any questions the witness may have.

At the outset of the meeting, the committee chair indicates the order in which witnesses will be heard and introduces the witnesses to the committee. 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.

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 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. To facilitate the work of the interpreters, it is recommended that you share a copy of your speaking notes, even handwritten ones, with the committee clerk before the meeting.

If you are invited to appear by videoconference, please review the instructions and confirmation details that will be sent to you by the clerk. You are also invited to consult the guide [“Best practices for videoconferencing”](#).

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 narrower, as the scope and principles of the bill being studied have already been agreed upon.
- You can speak to the principles of the bill, possible effects of the bill, or specific provisions.
- 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 of the bill.

#### Tools for understanding bills:

In [LEGISinfo](#), you will find:

- the text of bills;
- the major speeches in relation to bills;
- a legislative summary of all government bills; and
- government news releases and backgrounders.

Legislative summaries help explain the provisions of a bill in plain language.

#### **FOR FURTHER GUIDANCE**

- 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 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 delegated to a committee by the Senate. A committee's order of reference may be as all-encompassing as:

- 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 can do so even when 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 direction from members of the committee.

The clerk is a permanent employee of the Senate and is strictly non-partisan. They are knowledgeable about procedure and administrative policies, and you should direct any questions to them.

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

To obtain information about a committee, you can contact the clerk of the committee or visit the committee's website ([www.sencanada.ca](http://www.sencanada.ca)). 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.

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

## What is parliamentary privilege?

Since a committee's official meetings 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 it is over (adjourned).

### **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 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.

Witnesses are then 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?**

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.

### **Are there accommodations for persons with reduced mobility?**

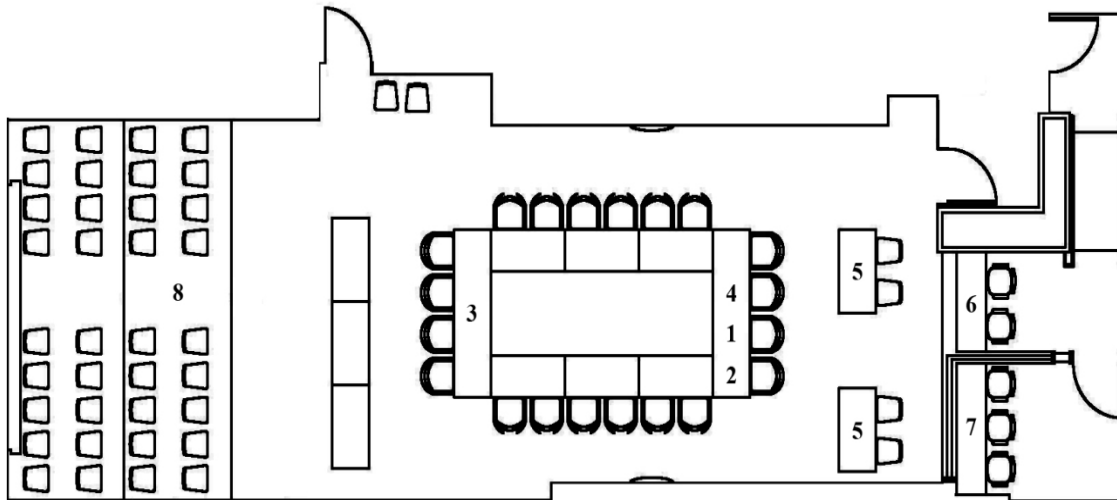
All parliamentary buildings and committee rooms are fully accessible and have entrances adapted for persons with reduced mobility. Washrooms in all Senate-occupied buildings can accommodate wheelchairs. If a witness requires further information, the clerk should be consulted.

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

All committee proceedings are available by default in both official languages. If a witness needs 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 is usually able to ensure interpretation in a third language. 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.



## Layout of a committee room



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

## Map showing entrances to Senate buildings

