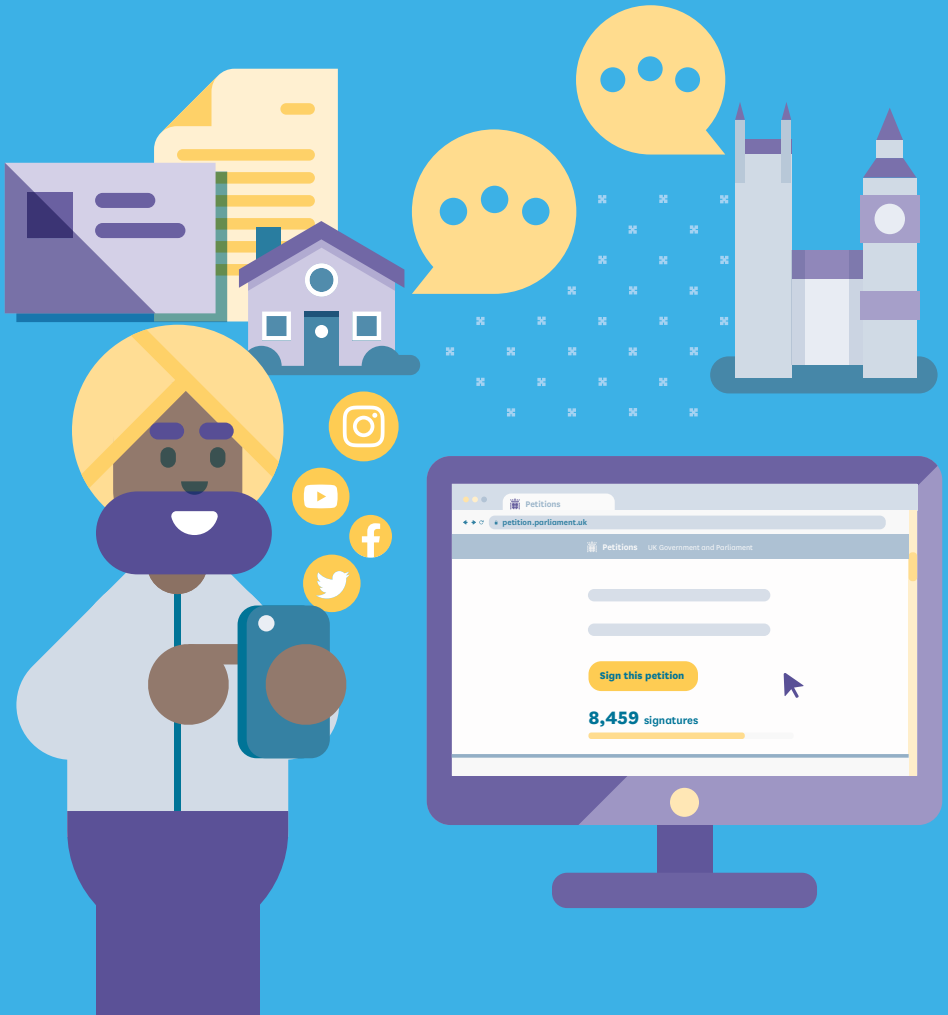


Have your say

How to get your voice heard by Parliament



In the UK, people use lots of different methods to call for change – from social media campaigns, to strikes, boycotts or letters to the local paper.

But sometimes the change you want to see can only happen if there is a change in the law – which means Parliament must be persuaded.

This guide has practical advice for anyone setting out to get their point across to members of the House of Commons or House of Lords – with some tips for making more of an impact.

Before you start take a look at the questions towards the end of this leaflet. Thinking about these things early on could help you avoid some common pitfalls, and ensure your time is spent more effectively.

How laws are changed

If the law you want to change was passed in an Act of Parliament, changing it is likely to take a new Act of Parliament.

Acts of Parliament begin their parliamentary journey as bills. Some bills are short and very narrow in scope, while government bills can run to hundreds of pages and deal with several related issues.

Before a bill can become an Act it has to go through a series of stages in Parliament, during which its contents can be changed, if members of both Houses agree that changes are needed.

So, the change in the law that you want to see might be achieved by one very specific bill – but it could also be achieved by adding a few new lines to a much broader bill on a related topic.

Members of both Houses can suggest changes to government bills before they are passed – or vote in support of changes that have been suggested by others. They can also introduce their own, more targeted, bills.



The Two Houses

For a law to be changed, both the House of Commons and the House of Lords need to agree. However, there are some important differences between the two Houses that are useful to know.

In the House of Commons, the government of the day will almost always have an in-built majority of its own party members in the Chamber and on all committees. Party loyalty among MPs is also strongly encouraged by the party business managers (whips). The government of the day can control the daily agenda and set the amount of time spent talking about each topic.

MPs are elected to serve for up to 5 years (known as a Parliament). Their constituents are then given another opportunity to decide who will represent them in the House of Commons, in a general election.

In the House of Lords, around a fifth of members do not belong to a political party at all and disagreements along rigid party lines are rarer. Members are valued for the knowledge and experience they bring to an issue and, as no political party or group has a majority in the Lords, the government cannot control the schedule of debates. There are no time limits when bills are being scrutinised and any member can suggest a change to the bill and have it discussed.

Members of the Lords are appointed for life, meaning they can afford to take a longer-term view of issues.



This guide describes several different ways to get in touch with Parliament about an issue, but it's sensible to start by contacting your own MP.

Contact Your MP

Wherever you live in the UK, you have an MP who represents you in the House of Commons. They are your person on the inside, so to speak. Your MP can speak to decision-makers in government on your behalf. No other MP will represent you directly in this way.

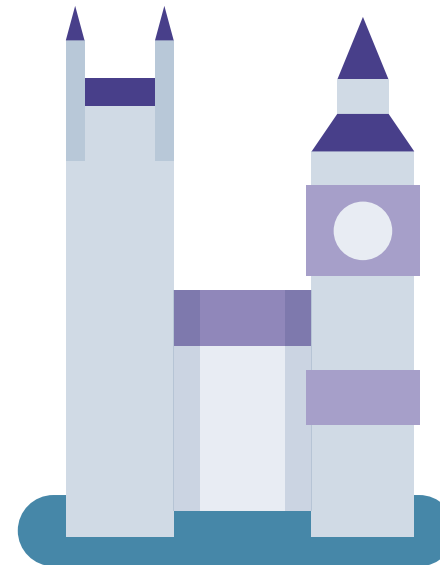
So, whether or not you voted for them, your MP is your first port of call if you want an issue raised in Parliament or with the government of the day.

Find out who your MP is and how to contact them: members.parliament.uk/members/commons

Each MP represents around 70,000 people, so they cannot support every cause. But if they can help, there are a range of tools available to MPs who want to raise an issue – see the MP's Toolkit list on pp12 for more details.

Your MP will decide how they can best use the tools available to them to press for the change you want to see.

Don't be put off if your MP happens to be the Speaker or a government minister. Although some MPs have extra responsibilities, they will still run constituency offices and take up local concerns. They won't challenge the government publicly. They might, instead, use private letters or meetings to raise your issue where their seniority might actually be of help.



Other ways to get your voice heard by Parliament.

Contact a member of the House of Lords

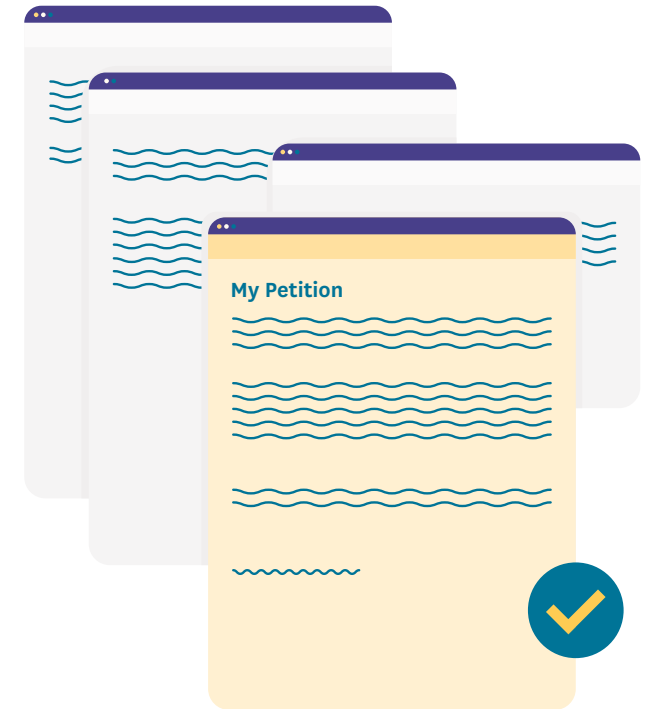
Members of the Lords do not have their own geographic constituencies. This means that you can approach any of its members. But where to start?

People are appointed to the Lords because of the knowledge and experience they have gained from careers in fields such as medicine, the arts, the legal system or industry. So, instead of taking part in debates on every subject, most members have specific areas they specialise in.

When choosing who to contact, look for those with a relevant field of interest, as that will often be the main focus of their activity in Parliament. You can filter Lords members by policy interest at: **members.parliament.uk** or search their speeches by keywords using **Hansard**.

Members of the Lords that are interested in a particular bill will appear in the 'Speakers Lists' that are published in advance of debates on the bill in the Lords. You can see the speakers list for a Lords debate by clicking on the debate entry in the calendar: **whatson.parliament.uk**

Like MPs, members of the House of Lords can use a variety of methods to highlight an issue: see p13.



Create or sign a petition

Any British citizen or UK resident can create or sign petitions via: petition.parliament.uk

New petitions are checked by the Petitions Committee to ensure that each petition is seeking action on something the UK Parliament or government is responsible for, and that petitions meet all the requirements. At 10,000 signatures a petition will get a written response from the government. Petitions that reach 100,000 signatures or more are usually debated in the Commons. Find out more about the process at: **petition.parliament.uk/help**

Petitions can't change a law or government policy by themselves, but they can help to put an issue on Parliament's agenda and have led to action being taken. When a petition is debated, MPs can put people's concerns directly to the government minister responsible and get a reply on the record.

If you're not able to get online easily you can ask your MP to present a paper petition which will also be considered by the Petitions Committee.

Respond to a 'call for evidence'

There are times when the UK Parliament actively seeks input from the public, inviting them to send in their views and experiences. This is often done when a committee is investigating something or considering a new law.

Contribute to a select committee inquiry

Select committees are small, cross-party groups of backbench MPs or members of the House of Lords that are set up to investigate something in detail. Some committees are given a field to focus on – like health, education, the economy or science and technology – within which they can choose what to focus on specifically. Others are set up to look into just one issue – like gambling or food poverty.

Select committee findings are evidence-based. And because they are agreed unanimously by the whole cross-party committee, they are seen to have more weight.

How they work


A new select committee inquiry starts with an invitation to the public to send in their views and experiences. This is backed up by formal public hearings where committee members can hear more from individuals and experts, before cross-questioning the ministers and officials who are responsible for the policy. Finally, the committee publish their findings – including any action they think the government should take. The government is expected to respond within two months.

How to have your say

When an inquiry is launched that is relevant to an issue you care about, it is a chance to put your case and explain why you think a change is needed. To do this, you can send in your views online, attend a public meeting or ask to give evidence in person at Parliament.

The committee may use your information to help shape their inquiry and to inform the questions they put to officials during their public hearings.

Keep up to date with new inquiries by following committees on Twitter and checking the list of Committees currently accepting written evidence, search:

 [find committee inquiry](#)



Comment directly on new legislation

Draft bills

Select committees are also asked from time to time to examine draft versions of bills that the government intend to bring forward at some point in the future. A draft bill may be referred to an existing select committee or, occasionally, to a joint committee (with members from both Houses) that is set

up especially. These committees often invite comments from the wider public which is an opportunity to have your say at an early stage – before the final bill has been drawn up. Find information about draft bills by searching:

 **draft bills parliament**

Public Bill Committees

In the House of Commons, government bills are normally referred to Public Bill Committees for detailed discussion directly after their second reading stage. A Public Bill committee is made up of around 20 MPs and is named after the relevant bill, e.g. the Agriculture Bill Committee. This makes it clear that the committee's one task is to scrutinise that specific bill.

Once the committee is set up, anyone can send in their views about the bill. The committee may also choose to invite some people to give oral evidence.

You can find out when Public Bill Committees are sitting and submit written evidence through the Parliament website by searching:

 **calls for evidence parliament**

If you think you or your organisation should be considered to give oral evidence, you can contact the **Scrutiny Unit** for advice.

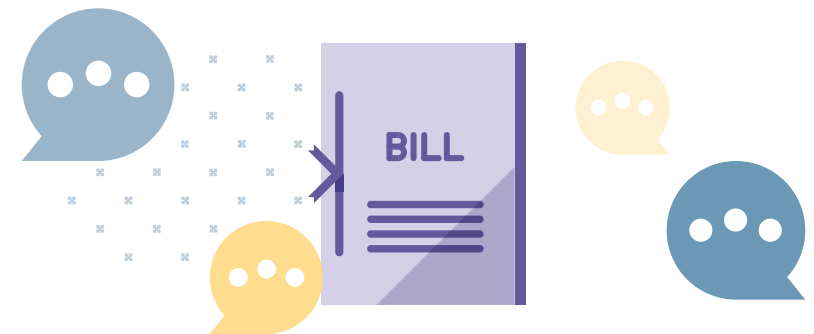
Contact an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)

APPGs are informal cross-party groups. They bring together members from both Houses who share an interest in a topic, regardless of any political party affiliation. Although they don't have official status in Parliament, they have been used effectively by members to coordinate their efforts and have more impact.

Because they are less formal, it is often possible for the public to get involved with APPGs through sharing their experiences or new research. They can help you identify parliamentarians with an existing interest in the subject from across the parties in both Houses.

Find out if there is an All-Party Parliamentary Group on a subject relevant to your issue, and how to contact them by checking the list of APPGs, search:

 **register APPGs**



Organise a mass lobby of Parliament

A mass lobby is when a large number of people contact their MPs and members of the Lords in advance and arrange to meet with them at Parliament all on the same day. Mass lobbies are usually organised by larger national or regional campaign groups who arrange for them to coincide with a public rally or demonstration in London.

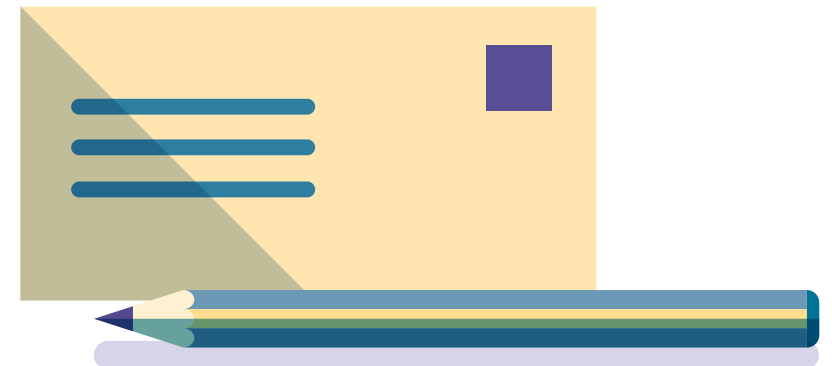
Organisers of mass lobbies should arrange them with Parliament in advance. For more information search:

 **lobby parliament**

A Member's toolkit

Most MPs can	
Write in confidence to a minister and receive a timely reply through private correspondence	Apply to hold a longer, Backbench Business Committee debate in the Chamber or Westminster Hall, with the support of other MPs from across the House
Enter the ballot to put a question to a minister – or the Prime Minister – in the chamber at the daily Ministerial Question Times	Table an Early Day Motion to highlight an issue, allowing other MPs to add their names and demonstrate the level of support
Ask the Speaker to allow an Urgent Question – requiring a minister to come to the Commons and be held to account	Table amendments to bills during their Committee and Report stages – or support amendments (changes in the wording) tabled by other MPs
Find out official information or follow up on commitments made by ministers in the Chamber through Written Parliamentary Questions	Introduce their own Private Member's bill as a way of highlighting an issue or influencing the House's opinion
Enter a ballot to sponsor their own debate – allowing them to choose the subject and receive a considered reply from the relevant minister – MPs can apply for Westminster Hall debates or one of the daily Adjournment debates	Take part in votes (divisions) on any motion that the Commons is asked to decide

Most members of the Lords can	
Take part in daily oral questions in the Lords by tabling their own or asking a follow up question	Table amendments to bills – or support amendments (changes in the wording) tabled by other members
Request their own debate by tabling a Question for Short Debate in the Lords	Introduce their own private member's bill as a way of highlighting an issue or influencing the House's opinion
Write to ministers privately or table a Written Parliamentary Question to get a reply in writing	Take part in votes (divisions) on any motion that the Lords is asked to decide
Put forward a Private Notice Question on an urgent and important topic to require a minister to come to the Lords and be held to account	Apply for a longer, balloted debate in the Lords



Before you start checklist

1. **Is this issue something that the UK government and Parliament is responsible for?**

Lots of rules and regulations that affect us are not made by the UK Parliament, but by local councils or the courts, instead. If you live in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland some laws are made by your devolved parliament or assembly.

Citizens Advice can usually help you find out who the key decision makers are in each case – you can use their online Advice Guide: citizensadvice.org.uk

2. **Are there other people who agree with me?**

There may already be people who are campaigning for the same change you want to see. Your efforts will have more of an effect if you can work together, so it is worth finding this out.

3. **Would people from all political sides support my issue?**

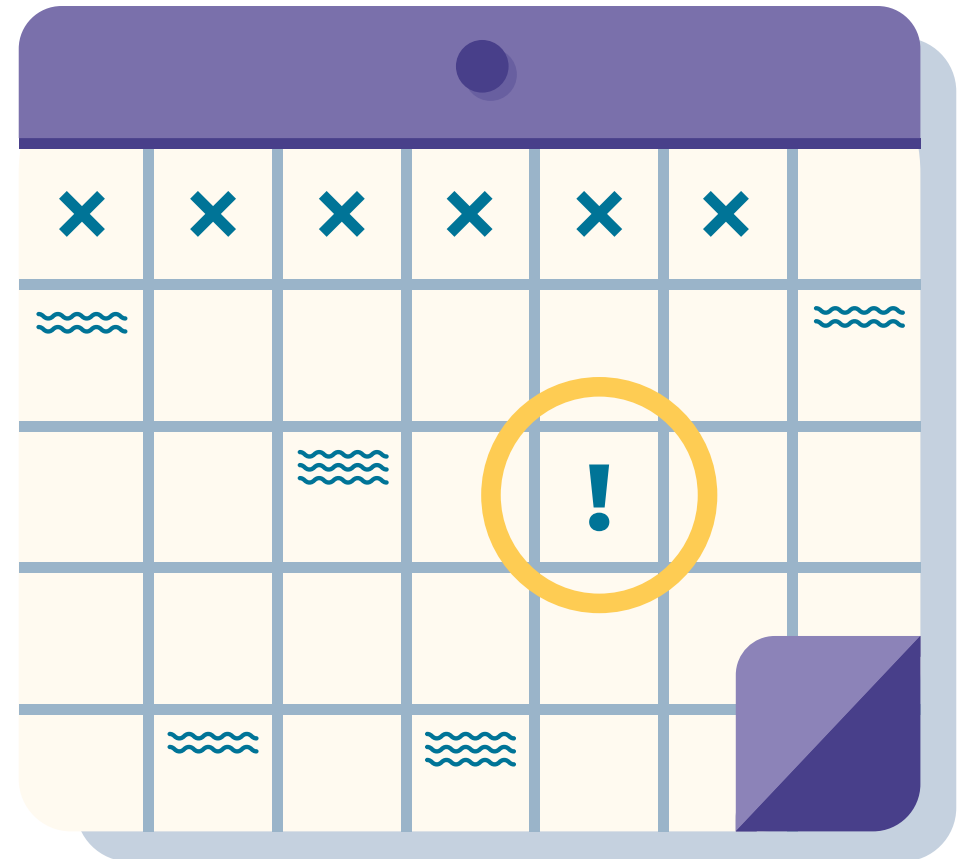
Cross-party campaigns are more difficult to dismiss as political point-scoring or electioneering, particularly in the Commons. So, if you can, try to make sure your issue isn't 'party-political' and, where you can, make use of cross-party bodies. In the Lords, attracting support from the Crossbenches can also be valuable.

4. **Why is the law as it is? Has anyone tried before to change it?**

Understanding the background to the law you are trying to change, and whether previous attempts have been made to change it, may help you improve your case as well as letting you learn from others' experience. The Libraries of both Houses produce helpful briefings on almost every topic which often include this type of information – search by theme or keyword at: researchbriefings.parliament.uk

Reality check...

Most attempts to change the law don't happen overnight. Be prepared to use a range of strategies and look out for any opportunities to keep your issue on Parliament's agenda.



Want to know more?

Contact us if you have a question about the House of Commons or House of Lords.

House of Commons Enquiry Service



hcenquiries@parliament.uk



0800 112 4272 (Freephone) or 020 7219 4272



House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

House of Lords Enquiry Service



hlinfo@parliament.uk



0800 223 0855 (Freephone) or 020 7219 3107



House of Lords, London, SW1A 0PW

Callers with a text phone can talk through Text Relay by calling **18001** followed by the full number.

Copies of all our publications can be ordered online:
orderresources.parliament.uk

For alternative formats, contact:
hcenquiries@parliament.uk