

The Power of Senate Committees

Some of the most relevant and enduring work of the Senate has happened in its committees; they have two primary purposes. The first is to study legislation, with government bills taking priority over Senate Public Bills or Private Members Bills from the House of Commons. It's at this stage that changes or "amendments" can be made to that bill. They can also append observations to a bill to draw attention to important factors that should be considered when interpreting the bill or noting issues with the bill that were not addressed by amendments. (For more information on this process, see our reference document called "Charting the Passage of Legislation".)

Secondly, committees can initiate studies on a certain topic related to that committee's mandate. These studies can be anywhere from a day to years long, depending on the complexity of the issue. At the end of the study, a report is tabled in the Senate Chamber, usually with recommendations to the government to address the issue. The Committee's Chair can move that the report be adopted with a request for a government response, giving the government 180 days to formally respond to each recommendation in the report. It's through this mechanism that Senate committees have the power to contribute to change either by forming the basis for new legislation or helping shape and change policy.

How Can I get involved in a Senate committee's work?

01

Be a witness

You can request to appear on studies and legislative reviews that are important to you by emailing the clerk of the committee or the Chair.

02

Write a Brief

Written submissions can also be made when a committee is studying a piece of legislation or issue. All submissions are translated and distributed in French and English, so typically briefs should be capped between 1000 and 1500 words.

03

Stay Informed

It's important to know how your representatives are working on your behalf. Follow the work of Senate committees by visiting www.sencanada.ca/en/committees. You can follow a bill's journey to becoming law at www.parl.ca/legisinfo/en. Or sign-up for legislative alerts at www.PJProsper.ca.

Find more helpful resources:
www.PJProsper.ca