

Parliamentary Committees



Parliamentary Committees

In British Columbia's grand and historic Parliament Buildings, our elected representatives – called Members of the Legislative Assembly or MLAs – meet to shape the future of our province by debating and passing the laws that govern British Columbians.

British Columbia is divided into 87 constituencies or ridings. One MLA is elected from each riding to speak on behalf of the people who live there.

MLAs at Work

MLAs have a number of responsibilities, both in their home ridings and in the Legislative Assembly (also known as the House). These responsibilities include representing the interests of their constituents (people who live in their riding), studying and debating all proposed new laws (called bills), asking questions to make sure government activities are well-planned and appropriate, and voting on government funding requests.

MLAs may also be appointed to serve on Parliamentary Committees established to examine and discuss social, economic, environmental or governance issues of importance to British Columbians.

Types of Committees

There are two types of Parliamentary Committees: Select Standing and Special. Select Standing Committees are authorized by the Legislative Assembly to investigate and report on a particular aspect of government operations. Select Standing Committees are appointed on a regular basis, but only active when the House gives them



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terms of reference. An example is the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.

Occasionally, the Legislative Assembly will authorize Special Committees to look closely at a single specific issue. A Special Committee ends after its final report has been presented to the House. An example is the Special Committee to appoint the Police Complaints Commissioner.

Membership

Committees are made up of MLAs from both the government and the opposition, but generally do not include either the Premier or Cabinet ministers. Most have between 10 and 15 members.

MLAs with an interest in the work of a particular committee may attend meetings as observers and participate in debates, but cannot vote on agenda items.

Functions

Parliamentary Committees allow MLAs to look closely at a particular issue – education, for example, or the provincial health care system – and make policy recommendations to the House.

They provide a way for MLAs to examine the activities and expenditures of government ministries and they keep the government and the public service accountable to the people of British Columbia.

They also offer MLAs an opportunity to hear the views of the general public on a particular issue, or to consult with community, professional, business, academic and other groups or experts. Committee consultations are one of the primary means for directly involving the public in the workings of the Legislative Assembly.

Another important function of the Parliamentary committee system is the selection of independent government watchdogs – the statutory officers of the Legislative Assembly. Parliamentary committees interview and recommend candidates for these positions, which include such officers as the Auditor General and the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Process

Before a committee can begin its work, an MLA – usually a Cabinet minister – makes a motion in the House giving the committee its terms of reference. The terms of reference provide the committee's mandate and give it permission to meet, call witnesses and hire staff. If the Legislative Assembly agrees to the motion, the committee becomes active and a Clerk to the Committee (a non-partisan officer of the Legislative Assembly) is assigned to coordinate the committee's activities and advise committee members on parliamentary procedure and administrative issues.

At its first meeting, a committee will elect both a Chair and a Deputy Chair and then begin to develop the committee's budget, plan its activities and set target dates for completing its work.



Committees generally meet when the House is not sitting. Although MLAs work year-round, the House “sits” – is in session – only part of the year, usually from February through May and again in October and November.

Activities

In order to gather information for their investigations, committees may call public officials to answer questions or call for written submissions or hold open public meetings in various locations across the province. Once the committee members have considered the evidence they have gathered, they will write a report and deliver it to the House. The report will include the committee’s findings and recommendations.

The government may or may not act on the committee’s recommendations, but the report will form the basis for further discussion and debate in the House and ensure that the parliamentary committee’s position is known to the public.

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

Attend a public committee meeting in Room 226 of the Parliament Buildings or listen to the audio at any time. Present your views to committee members at a public hearing in your area or send in a written submission. For more information, check the Parliamentary Committees website at: www.leg.bc.ca/cmt/index.htm.



Visiting the Legislative Assembly

WE WELCOME VISITORS.

Free tours of British Columbia’s Parliament Buildings are available Monday through Friday throughout the year, and seven days a week in the summer months.

To see MLAs in action, visitors are welcome in the public galleries of the Legislative Chamber whenever the House is sitting. Please note that the galleries are often full during Question Period – the 30-minute period every Monday to Thursday when MLAs ask questions about government activities.

For further details, visit www.leg.bc.ca or contact:

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To visit the Parliament Buildings, go to www.leg.bc.ca/tours or contact:

Parliamentary Tour Program
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