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Overview

Sometimes not all of your campaign demands can be implemented by a decision-maker overnight. To ban smoking in public, a law needs to be updated. To make sure learners who have their period don't miss school because they can't afford a sanitary pad, you need National Treasury to include money for that in the budget. To help stop mobile networks ripping off pre-paid consumers, new regulations had to be put in place.

Whether it is a law, policy, budget, regulation or process that is being changed or created, it should involve public participation which is done by a government department and the parliamentary committee that is in charge of holding that government department, and its Minister accountable to the people. Other times it is a public institution like the Competition Commission or a regulator like ICASA.

Government, Parliament and public institutions are supposed to serve the people. But often those most impacted by injustice, face the greatest barriers to participating in the creation of a law, policy, budget or regulation. That is why it is so important that we organise our communities and make sure our voices are heard. When we don't, it is often the greedy and corrupt who stand to benefit.

When it comes to running a send message action, there are three things you need to find out:

1. Is there an opportunity for public comment on your issue?

To get this information you should contact the government department, parliamentary committee or public institution that is in charge of addressing the issue you want to fix. Find out from them if they are working on law, policy, budget or regulation, that could address the issue I'm campaigning on. You are supposed to be able to visit government websites and [parliament's website](#) without needing data. Other ways to get information include looking at the social media of parliament, or the relevant department or institution. Or give them a call. You can also find information from the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG): <https://pmg.org.za/calls-for-comments/>. If the law, policy, budget or regulation has been stuck for over six months, you may need to launch a petition to put pressure on the decision-maker to open public comment up.

2. What is the deadline for public comment and how do you submit public comments?

If there is a public comment process, find out what the deadline for public comments is and get the contact details of the person receiving the public comments, especially their email address. Sometimes there can be very little notice given for public comment. You can call for the public comment deadline to be extended.

3. Where can you get access to the document you need to comment on?

The department, institution or committee should provide you with the official document you need to give your input on. You might be sent a website link to the document, or it could be emailed to you. These documents often draft laws, policies, budgets or regulations and use lots of big complicated legal words that not many people understand. Try to do some research, and if there is a person or an organisation that has the same concerns about the issue you have, contact them as they might be able to help you understand the document that you must submit public comments on. PMG often provides these documents: <https://pmg.org.za/calls-for-comments/>

How to set up send message action

To set up **send message action**, first set up a petition using the [start your petition](#) button on the home page of awethu.mobi platform.

Since **send message action** can only be set up by amandla.mobi staff members after a petition has been set up, please ensure that you are following the [process for setting up the petition](#).

Essential elements of the **send message action**

Details about decision-maker

 **Name, title and name of the institution receiving public comment:**

Some examples

Writing to Ms Lyn Moeng-Mahlangu
Health Department Chief Director for
Non-Communicable Diseases

Writing to Lindiwe Zulu
Minister of Social Development of
South Africa

 **Email address of decision-maker:** The email address or process for accepting public comment will be provided by the institution. Submit your own public comment and request the decision-maker respond by email or other method to confirm they have received and will consider the public comment. If the decision-maker does not respond to you, you may have to make multiple phone calls to get them to confirm. It may turn out the email address is incorrect, or public comments are ending up in spam. It is important to make sure the communication method works, otherwise public comments have a habit of “going missing”. At the end of the public comment campaign, just before the deadline. Email the decision-maker and confirm with them the number of public comments they have received and make sure the numbers line up with the number of public comments sent through your message action page on awethu.mobi.

Instructions to supporters.

Depending on the nature of the campaign provide instructions for signers. Consider prompting signers to personalise their comments/ submissions or suggesting talking points to include.

Some examples

Instructions

You can edit this submission and we strongly encourage you to add more information. You can also share why you feel an NHI that works for the people is important to you.

Instructions

Use this to send a direct message to tell Minister of Social Development to Pay the ECD funds now!

Default subject line of the email

The message subject will be displayed with each letter. You can use main petition demand as the default subject line,

Default message subject

I support the NHI Bill but it must serve the poor majority

Default message subject

Pay The ECD Relief Funds Now!

Default content for the message/ comment/ letter/ submission etc.

While supporters can change the content of the letter, it is important to set up a default message with clear demands. In the default content, mention the following.

1. *What is the issue?* - A new bill is passed, the government is inviting suggestions, and an issue is urgent and needs timely attention.
2. *What are the demands* - Clearly explain each of the demands and why it is important, and provide references to evidence. This helps to ensure that the opinion people are submitting is backed by evidence.

Once the petition is approved, and you have prepared the above information, [fill out this form](#) with the information you have prepared and send an email to amandla.mobi team (awethu@amandla.mobi) so they can review the text and assist with turning the petition into a **send message action** page.

Many people don't have email addresses. amandla.mobi has limited resources and is a small team, but you can request assistance from us to help you collect messages from people who don't have email addresses or data. If we can, we will do our best to help and talk you through what this involves.

Check out some of our send message action campaigns

1. [Public comment to a government department:](#) This public comment campaign was addressed to the Department of Health when they were looking at introducing a new anti-smoking law:
2. [Public comment on a budget:](#) This campaign was addressed to the Minister of Finance in the lead up to the delivery of the budget speech:
3. [Public comment to a parliamentary committee:](#) This public comment campaign was addressed to the Parliamentary Committee on Health when the National Health Insurance Bill was open for public comment:
4. [Public comment to a regulator:](#) This public comment campaign was addressed to the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) who was working on new pro-poor regulations to protect consumers from mobile networks.

Additional information that is more specific to the creation of a new law, or updating an existing law

When it comes to making or changing a law, it goes through what is called the 'legislative process, you can learn more about that process [here](#)

The quick explanation is that a government department, for example, the Department of Health, wants to create a law, or change a law that is there already, the department puts together a Green Paper to discuss what they want to change. This is a bit like a first draft. Government departments are accountable to the people, so anyone can comment on the Green Paper.

The government department is then supposed to take all the comments, and then put together a 'White Paper' which is a bit like a second draft. Again anyone can then comment on this second draft. Once the White paper input is received, a draft version of a law is written up, this is often called a Draft Bill, which is a bit like the final draft. The Draft Bill will either introduce a new law, also called an Act, or it will update (amend) a law (Act) that is already there. Sometimes the Minister of that government department will ask for public comment on the Draft Bill, but most of the time the government department sends the Draft Bill to the committee in parliament which oversees that department.

So for example, the Water and Sanitation Committee in Parliament is supposed to hold the Department of Water and Sanitation accountable, including that department's Minister. The parliament committee is made up of Members of Parliament (MPs) who are publicly elected officials (politicians). Just like government officials, they are accountable to the people. MPs from different political parties can sit on a committee. The parliamentary committee that has received the Draft Bill is supposed to get public comment on the Draft Bill.

Basically, what happens is that a government department like the Department of Health, or National Treasury, will start the process by creating a document called a Green Paper. A Green Paper starts the discussion about the need for a new law or a change to a law. It is often not well advertised, but the government department which created the Green Paper is supposed to get public comment. Once that has been done a more specific document called a White Paper is finalised. Again the public should be able to have their say on the White Paper by sending their public comments to that government department.

Once the White paper input is received, a draft version of law is written up, this is often called a Draft Bill. The Draft Bill will either introduce a new law, also called an Act, or it will update (amend) an law (Act) that is already there. Sometimes the Minister of that government department will ask for public comment on the Draft Bill, this can be written comments to the committee, but sometimes the committee can also invite the public to speak to the committee at a public hearing. Most of these committee hearings are done by Zoom which excludes many people because of the cost of data, not having a smartphone or knowing how to use Zoom. If amandla.mobi can, we will do our best to assist you so you can participate in the committee public hearing and speak in the language you feel most comfortable with. The one benefit of public hearings being done by Zoom is that you don't have to travel to Parliament in Cape Town to speak to the committee. Before Zoom, often only those who could afford the transport and the time could present to the committee.



One of the best places to get information about public comments on Draft Bills is from the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG) website. They run this webpage that has the most up to date information including links to Draft Bills, the deadline for public comment and information on how to submit public comments <https://pmg.org.za/calls-for-comments/>.