

Newspective

Working Towards A Fact-Based Future
By Students, For Students

How to Comment on a Bill and its Meaning

Want to help? Learn what it means and how to comment on a bill.

There are many steps built into the legislative process, where you can directly voice your opinion to those directly in power. One of the easiest ways is through **Public Comment**.

Commenting on a bill offers an opportunity for everybody to participate in drafting and editing laws in a way that goes voting. Your comment can give lawmakers a perspective they wouldn't have previously considered and change the way they move forward with a particular bill.

1. Who Can Make a Public Comment

Any person, group, organization — including nonprofits and lobbying groups — and other interested federal agencies can comment on a bill. Comments can be submitted anonymously or by a third-party representative, such as a lawyer, friend, organization, or federal agency.

2. How A Public Comment Works

- There is typically a 60-day period immediately following its publication of the proposed law for public commenting. This period closes at 7:00 ET for comments submitted in writing, and at 11:59 ET for digitally submitted comments on the final day of commenting.
- This is followed by a 30-day reply period, in which the government is required to respond to those comments made during that initial 60-day period.
- By law, the executive branch of the Federal Government must respond to all public comments.

3. What Documents are Open for Public Comment?

→ Preliminary Rule-Making Documents:

- **Pre-notice of Proposed Rule-Making:** no rules are proposed yet but comments are invited with the intent to add, remove, or alter a rule or regulation.
- **Notice of Proposed Rule-making:** is a public notice that's issued whenever the executive branch plans to add, remove, or change a rule or regulation.
- **Further Notice of Proposed Rule-making:** If the executive branch changes its regulation proposal drastically in response to public comments. They publish this notice.

4. How to Make A Public Comment

The option to submit a digital public comment on a federal agency document can be done in 2 ways:

1. Directly through the federal agency's site.
2. Through the Federal Register (regulation.gov).

The proposed or existing regulation or rule must provide the opportunity to submit a comment digitally. Directions are typically on the right-hand side of the webpage. The document must also provide direct mail and telephone contact information. The personal information collected by agencies may vary.

Once you've submitted your comment, a confirmation page will provide a comment tracking number. In addition, people may file or fax their comments.

5. Agency Response to Public Comment

Under the Administrative Procedures Act, federal agencies are legally required to respond to every unique, fact-based comment. These responses are published, along with the final rule or action, in the Federal Register. If the agency does not respond to such a comment, or does respond but does so in a way that may be considered "arbitrary and capricious," the commenter has cause to take the agency to court for violating procedural law. This is usually done by a special interest group with extra resources, rather than an average citizen.

6. Tracking the Effect of your Comment

So you've commented - now what? If you submitted your comment through the online portal at Regulations.gov, you can sign up to receive email notifications about any newly posted documents related to that regulation. This will include the publication of the final rule, along with the agency responses to substantive comments. Learn more about the email alert system and how to sign up [here](#), on Regulations.gov ("Sign Up for Email Alerts" tab).

7. Tips for Leaving a Comment

8. Be very familiar with the contents of the bill you are planning to comment on, and the issues.
9. When commenting, use a heading that states the billing name and docket ID number. The ID number will automatically be associated with your comment when submitting online.
10. Establish your expertise in the area you are commenting on, and support your comment with research, data, or empirical information. However, you can also keep it simple by simply stating whether you support the proposed bill or not and why.
11. Be as clear as possible:
 - Define your objectives.
 - Use clear organization and formatting, and precise language.
 - Present an argument, supported with data if needed, and show how it is related to the document you're discussing.
 - Pay attention to any requests for data or information, or questions within the document.
 - Cited or include sources, if you refer to outside material in your comment.
 - A template example is the following:

COVER LETTER

Re: [\[Docket ID, Document Title\]](#)

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on [\[Document Title\]](#). I am... *1-2 sentences introducing yourself and your credentials, as they relate to the comment you are writing.*

I would like to... [raise concerns / inform you of new information / provide supporting evidence] regarding [Document Title]:

1. [1 sentence describing first major point]
2. [1 sentence describing second major point]
3. etc...

In summary, [1-2 sentences summarizing your comment]. Please see below for additional details and pertinent literature.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Degree, Additional Qualifications]

MAIN COMMENT TEXT

[First major point]

Several short paragraphs supporting your first point. Include references to literature that is cited in the bibliography.

[Second major point]

Several short paragraphs supporting your second point. Include references to literature that is cited in the bibliography.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

List of your sources; include links or DOI when appropriate.

Sources

- [Who Can Make a Public Comment](#)
- [How A Public Comment Works](#)
- [Tips for Leaving a Comment](#)
- Here is a video that summarizes public commenting:
<https://youtu.be/Zx9tcHHR8eM>