

Martin Obbard, petitioner

09 February 2021

Dear Mr Obbard

Petition P-05-1125 Petitions with more than 5,000 signatures should be debated not just considered for debate

Thank you for submitting the above petition to the Senedd. I am responding as the processes for considering petitions are the responsibility of the Petitions Committee.

The Petitions Committee considers and scrutinises all petitions which collect more than 50 signatures. The upper threshold, above which the Committee considers whether it should request time for a petition to be debated in a full Plenary meeting, was introduced by the current Petitions Committee in March 2017. This was done in consultation with the Business Committee, which is responsible for the scheduling of business in Plenary. Before then, petitions were only debated by the whole Senedd if the Petitions Committee had produced a report on the issue following its own detailed scrutiny.

Our motivation in introducing this mechanism was to provide a more direct and timely route through which petitions demonstrating significant levels of public support could be discussed by the full Senedd, without needing to be scrutinised by a committee first. At the time of writing, 19 petitions have been debated as a result and I am proud that this process has provided these opportunities for a number of important issues to be raised in this way. You can find details of all the petitions debated by this Senedd at the following link:

<https://petitions.senedd.wales/petitions?state=debated>

Nevertheless, I believe it is right that we should take a number of factors into account when deciding whether or not an immediate debate on the issue raised by a petition is an appropriate course of action, and there are several reasons why it is neither practical or appropriate for all petitions achieving the threshold to be debated. For example:



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- The issue raised by the petition may have been resolved or have changed significantly since the petition was created;
- The issue may have been debated recently, raised in other ways or be subject to detailed scrutiny by another Senedd committee;
- The issue may be able to be scrutinised more effectively through detailed examination by the Petitions Committee or another Senedd committee; or
- The petition may have collected a significant proportion of its signatures from outside of Wales.

There is also a limit to the Senedd's capacity to schedule debates in Plenary and a number of other competing demands on that capacity, including debates tabled by other committees, political groups and individual Members of the Senedd. We therefore seek to apply our discretion in order to ensure that this mechanism is used to facilitate the most effective and appropriate scrutiny of issues raised through the petitions process.

Finally, as you may already be aware, the Petitions Committee has taken the difficult decision to change the 'debate threshold' since you submitted the petition. Between March 2017 and November 2020 the threshold for considering petitions for a debate was 5,000 signatures however, since 1 December 2020, this has increased to 10,000 signatures.

The Committee is acutely aware of the need to provide clear information and expectations to everyone who uses the petitions process. We took this decision in response to a significant increase in the number of petitions that have collected large numbers of signatures since the middle of last year, because we were increasingly only able to schedule debates on a relatively small number of the petitions achieving the previous threshold. We are keeping this issue under review until the end of this Senedd term with a view to making a recommendation ahead of the next Senedd.

I hope that this response is helpful in explaining the processes and decision-making used by the Petitions Committee, and I look forward to receiving and further views you may have to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition.

Yours sincerely



Janet Finch-Saunders MS
Chair



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