

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD: PUBLIC COMMENT



What is a Public Comment?

Each federal agency must follow certain rules anytime they want to create, clarify, or change policy. These rules are separate from legislation that happens in Congress. We have the right to comment on federal policies, which the Executive branch must consider and respond to. However, this right is under-utilized. Comments are crucial for informing policy makers, potentially even causing them to act and make changes or add clarity to proposed policy. Our perspectives as individuals who are directly impacted are incredibly important to highlighting the harms of the criminal legal system. Effective comments provide relevant information and explain personal impacts. The notice-and-comment process allows public feedback and a response—and sometimes action—related to all unique comments.

Drafting Your Public Comment

When drafting your comment, here are a few recommended best practices:

- If you choose to use a template letter, we recommend using the template as a starting point and to include your unique thoughts, examples, and voice. You can learn more about each comment's specific questions in each policy's docket listing.
- If you do not use a template, it is important to include the docket number for this particular policy change.
- Public comment periods often are accompanied by an overview of the changes from various advocacy groups, as well as specific questions the federal government would like feedback on. We encourage you to choose content that you feel comfortable commenting on and have perspectives that provide answers and insights. Remember, the federal government must read and respond to each unique comment!
- Including both data from stories and numbers compliments your perspective in the comments. These help the federal government learn about the policy's impact.
- Coalitions or organizations may consider if you want to submit comments collectively or as individual members.

Questions for Public Comment

In addition to content categories and the sign-on letter text as starting points for your comments, agencies also specifically request comments and answers to specific questions that you may consider including responses to. These questions are usually found toward the bottom of the Federal Register listing but can also provide specifics for your use. It is not necessary for those wishing to comment to answer all of the questions nor is it required that comments are styled in question/answer formatting. Select the content that best aligns with your experience and expertise!

Submitting a Public Comment

[Regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) is the official platform for public comments on regulations. Each rule has a docket folder containing all relevant materials, accessible through the site. Comments can be submitted by clicking "Submit a formal comment" on the Federal Register document page or by

searching for the docket number on Regulations.gov and clicking “Comment Now!” You can type your comment directly into the text box or upload a file. Both site links can be found below in the resource section.

To learn more about the Regulations.gov site, we encourage you to [utilize their brief video](#). *New final rules must be sent to Congress for review. If you would also like to provide feedback on a regulation to your Congressional lawmaker for additional advocacy, you can locate your U.S. Representative and/or Senator by using the resource link below.*

Additional Resources

[Regulations.gov: Submit and Read Public Comments](#)

[The Federal Rulemaking Process](#)

[The Federal Register *Sample*: HUD's 2024 Proposed Rule](#)

[Boundless: How to Submit a Public Comment](#)

[Brookings Institute: How to Effectively Comment on Regulation](#)

[Find Your Member of Congress](#)