

VISITING THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

WE WELCOME VISITORS. Free tours of the B.C. Parliament Buildings are available Monday through Friday throughout the year, and on Saturdays and Sundays 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. The galleries are often full during Question Period – the 30-minute period every Monday to Thursday afternoon when MLAs ask questions about government activities, so plan to arrive early.

For more information on the work of the Legislative Assembly, please contact:

**Public Education and Outreach  
Room 144, Parliament Buildings  
Victoria B.C. V8V 1X4  
250-387-8669 phone  
250-356-5981 fax  
PEO@leg.bc.ca**

For information on visiting the Parliament Buildings, please contact:

**Tour Office  
Parliament Buildings  
Victoria B.C. V8V 1X4  
250-387-3046**

Or visit the Legislative Assembly website at:  
[www.leg.bc.ca](http://www.leg.bc.ca)

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, 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" only part of the year, usually February through May and October and November).

ACTIVITIES

To gather information for their investigations, committees may call public officials to answer questions as needed, or may consult with all British Columbians by calling for written submissions or holding open public meetings.

Once the members of a committee have considered all the information, or evidence they have gathered, they will write a report on their investigation 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 within the House, and ensure that the committee's position is known to the public.

PARLIAMENTARY  
COMMITTEES

JUNE 2005

## SHAPING BRITISH COLUMBIA'S FUTURE

In the grand and historic British Columbia Parliament Buildings, our elected representatives – called Members of the Legislative Assembly or MLAs – come to meet, debate and pass the laws that govern the people of British Columbia, and help shape the future of our province.



## ROLE OF MLAS

In British Columbia, one MLA is elected from each of the 79 constituencies, or ridings, in the province.

Candidates are usually members of an organized political party, but they may run for election as independents.

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

MLAs may also be appointed to serve on one or more select standing or special committees, established to examine and discuss social, economic, environmental or governance issues of importance to British Columbians.

## SELECT STANDING COMMITTEES

Select standing committees are authorized by the Legislative Assembly to investigate and report on particular aspects of government operations. Select standing committees are permanent, but active only when the House gives them terms of reference. Examples are the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts and the Select Standing Committee on Health.

## SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Occasionally, the Legislative Assembly will establish what are called “special committees” to look closely at a single, specific issue. A special committee ceases to exist after it has completed its investigation and presented its final report to the House. Examples are the Special Committee on the Multilateral Agreement on Investment and the Special Committee to Appoint an Ombudsman.

## 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 who have an interest in the work of a particular committee – but who have not been appointed to that committee – may attend meetings as observers and participate in debates, but cannot vote.

## FUNCTIONS

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

They provide a way for MLAs to examine the activities and expenditures of government ministries, and 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 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 the Auditor General and the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

## PROCESS

Before a committee can begin its work, an MLA – usually a cabinet minister – must first make a motion 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 retain personnel.

### MOTION

*A motion is a formal proposal made by an MLA requesting that the House undertake a particular action, order something to be done, or express an opinion on a specific topic. An MLA must make a motion before the Assembly can begin any discussion or debate. Once the debate is finished, the House will vote on the motion.*