

WRITING PUBLIC COMMENTS ON PROPOSED REGULATIONS

You can use your expertise can inform government policy in two broad ways: shaping legislation by engaging with lawmakers, or affecting policy implementation by commenting on agency “regulations” (also called “rules”). Here, we’ll focus on how to effectively provide input on agency regulations—the government actions that most directly affect our lives—through public comments.

What are “regulations” and why should you submit public comments?

Regulations are how laws are implemented, and they are typically the government actions that most directly affect our lives. Every time an agency creates, changes, or repeals a regulation, it provides an opportunity for the public to submit comments on the proposal.

What can public comments do?

- The notice & comment process is how agencies are held accountable to the public. By law, they must solicit public opinion and respond to substantive comments in the final regulation.
- Specifically, the agency pays attention to input on whether the regulation was designed using the correct process and whether the regulation will bring about the intended outcome.
- If you have relevant expertise or lived experience, especially if the agency has not already considered the information you provide, your comments can contribute to a change in the proposed regulation.
- Even if the agency doesn’t change the regulation in response to the comments it receives, the comments remain on the public record and the agency must respond to substantive comments in the final regulation. This record can potentially be used in future rule-making, legislation, or litigation.
- If you think a regulation would be beneficial, supportive comments can give the agency more evidence to support the regulation and help counterbalance others’ oppositional comments.

How can you find relevant opportunities to submit public comments?

- Federal regulations open for public comment can be found at [FederalRegister.Gov](https://www.federalregister.gov) and [Regulations.Gov](https://www.regulations.gov). States and municipalities have analogous systems, such as [CT eRegulations](https://www.ct.gov/ctportal/portal/ctportal.aspx?tid=111) for Connecticut.
- Professional organizations and advocacy groups that focus on the issues you’re interested in may find and share relevant regulations through websites, email, and social media. For example, the Ecological Society of America keeps [a running list](#) of ecology-relevant regulations that are currently open for comment.

How can you write an effective comment on a proposed regulation?

When considering public comments, agencies prioritize evidence over opinion. This is different from communicating with your elected representatives, who care about your opinion simply because you are a constituent. An effective comment will focus on data and concrete examples about a proposed regulation’s real-world impacts.

A clear structure will help make your comment digestible and impactful. Use signal words like “unintended consequences” or “critical flaw,” and include the following information:

1. Introduce yourself & show why the agency should take your comment seriously

- Who are you? What group do you represent, if any?
- What relevant expertise or lived experience do you bring to this topic?

2. Clearly reference the part of the proposed regulation you are commenting on

- Name and summarize the proposed regulation and identify the specific part you want to provide feedback on. Refer to specific sections by their headers or paragraph numbers.
- You do not need to comment on the entire regulation! Keep your comment targeted.

3. State your position & provide supporting evidence

- Clearly state whether you support or oppose the proposed regulation.
- Explain a targeted number of points about the effects of the proposed regulation:
 - Explain relevant data and their implications. Cite your sources!
 - If relevant, describe how the proposed regulation would affect your well-being and that of your family, friends, and colleagues. Will this regulation make your life harder or easier, more or less expensive, or more or less healthy?
 - Highlight any information you think the agency might not be aware of. This is where your unique expertise and/or lived experience can make the biggest difference.

What strategies enhance a comment's likelihood of impact?

- Tying your message to economic or health consequences.
- Suggesting an alternative approach the agency should consider.
- Using plain language and avoiding jargon.
- Working as a collective by mobilizing your colleagues and friends to write comments on the same issue, or writing one joint comment on behalf of a group you're part of. When writing individual comments, still try to keep each message unique (see below).
- Being respectful of the regulation's target issue. Even if you disagree with the regulation's premise, this will make the agency more likely to consider your feedback.

What approaches could undermine your message?

- Submitting a form letter that is identical to what others are submitting, which can signal that you haven't considered the issue deeply on your own.
- Including irrelevant information, which can dilute the impact of relevant information.

Public comments can make a difference. In the best case scenario, your comment could present the agency with new information that sways their decision. But even if your comment doesn't result in a change to the regulation, it can serve as an important record for future action.

Additional Resources

[An Overview of Federal Regulations and the Rulemaking Process](#)

[Regulations.gov Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[How to Comment on Proposed Regulations in Connecticut](#)

[Templates from the Public Comment Project](#)

[Sample Comments from the Public Comment Project](#)

[What Happens to a Public Comment After it is Submitted](#)

[Beyond Public Comments: Other Ways to Engage and Influence Federal Agencies](#)