

To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario: Petition Regarding Places of Worship

People of faith across Ontario have faced severe restrictions on their gatherings for worship during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Central to the public debate surrounding this has been the question of ‘what is essential?’ This petition was created to provide an opportunity to witness to the Government of Ontario regarding the essential nature of worship and the impact on our communities.

Please consider signing this petition, and sharing it with your family, friends, and communities. We want to encourage our MPPs and the Government of Ontario to recognize the importance and value of worship, and to include places of worship as an essential service under the Reopening Ontario Act allowing religious communities to gather for worship.

How to use this Petition:

- Print the attached petition, and sign it including your Name, Full Address, and Signature.
- All Signatures must be original and must be written directly on the petition.
- You must be a resident of Ontario to sign.
- Emailed, faxed, or photocopied petitions are not allowed.
- Send the petition to your MPP, asking them to present it in the House.

Why a paper petition?

In order to be recognized by the Legislative Assembly, the petition must be printed and mailed. MPPs that receive the petitions can present a petition during a regular meeting of the House. Officially, the Government of Ontario must file a response within 24 sitting days of the presentation of the petition.

How do I get more people to sign when I cannot see anyone outside my household?

Even if you can only have your immediate household sign the petition, send it in and the MPP can submit all the petitions they receive at once, even if they are spread over several pages.

How do I submit it?

Send this petition (in hard copy, not a photocopy) by mail to the office of your MPP. You can find their contact information here by using the ‘Find my MPP’ tool half-way down the page - <https://www.ola.org/en/members>

IMPORTANT: Please do NOT submit this cover info letter along with your petition. This letter can be discarded.

Petition Regarding Places of Worship

To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

WHEREAS worship is critical to the lives of many Ontarians; and the gathering for worship is an essential aspect of religious faith, and

WHEREAS the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* recognizes freedom of religion as fundamental and the Supreme Court of Canada has interpreted this as including the freedom “to manifest religious belief by worship and practice”; and

WHEREAS both the federal and the Ontario provincial legislatures have recognized religion as a human right; and

WHEREAS the social, emotional and spiritual elements of worship are significant; and

WHEREAS places of worship provide many valuable social services through their members to the communities they are in; and the good work of places of worship in their communities is hindered by the inability to physically gather; and

WHEREAS places of worship have been diligent in observing health and safety protocols and have not been a significant source of spread of COVID-19; and

WHEREAS the safety and the wellbeing of religious communities are best preserved through the cooperation of religious leaders and the Ontario government.

THEREFORE, we the undersigned petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

That the Legislature recognize the importance and value of worship and to include places of worship as an essential service under the Reopening Ontario Act allowing religious communities to gather for worship.

[illegible]