

Submitting as a community group

Submissions are a key way community groups can get their voices heard in the development of new laws. Community Law chooses to submit on bills or consultations when we can see a direct link to the clients we serve. It could be that we want to support the kaupapa or we have concerns about potential unforeseen side effects to the change.

The key to a submission from our lawyers are:

- Keep it simple
- Use headings
- Don't assume that the Select Committee knows a huge amount about the issues

Doing the research:

As a starting point we look at how well current legislation is working and where the gaps are, then assess the proposed legislation's adequacy in terms of meeting those gaps. If your organisation is working with a community affected by a potential law change you will know better than the law-makers how things are working on the ground.

There can be a disconnect between what the government says the law is going to do and what it will actually do. Don't trust the explanatory note that is put out with the bill. Instead read the important sections, talk to other affected groups about what the changes will mean in practice and research what people are saying online and in the media.

Writing the submission:

- Be concise!
- Have a concise executive summary upfront
- End with a bullet pointed summary of recommendations
- Include a brief paragraph about your expertise and/or client base in your introduction. Remember they are unlikely to read a page about all your activities.
- Numbering and subheadings are helpful. Big blocks of text aren't great at getting your message across and numbering helps when referring to your subs during oral submissions.
- Where stories can be appropriately anonymised, use them.
- We tend to make brief submissions on the overall policy direction of the reform around its symbolic significance – especially looking at the purpose statement and explanatory note. However, our focus is primarily on the substantive implications of the Bill. Sometimes the relative importance of these things will vary, depending on whether the key shifts are procedural or ideological in nature. Obviously procedural critiques are more readily accepted!