

Public Testimony Before a Decision-Making Body: Preparing for Success

Early Preparation for Public Testimony:

1. Select the topic or subject matter that you will be addressing. Find something that motivates you to invest your passion and share your experience.
2. Determine the purpose/goal of your remarks. What do you want to accomplish with your testimony?
3. Study details about the decision-making body, its authority, and what will be on the agenda at the meeting you are planning to attend.
4. Learn about the specific member(s) of the decision-making body, who might represent your constituency, for example a school board member who represents your Senate district.
 - Prior to your plans to testify, contact this person about who you are, (Youth Legislator from Senate District 21), which meeting you will be attending, and the purpose of your testimony.
 - Often, Youth Legislators testify during public testimony. However, when you do your research—which includes reviewing the agenda of the meeting you are planning to attend—the agenda might contain a topic on which you want to testify. If possible, in advance discuss this with your representative on this particular decision-making body. Know enough about what you are planning to share so that you will feel comfortable having a conversation with this official.

Preparing for Your Presentation:

1. Focus your remarks on no more than three key points, and support your message with research, including meaningful examples and relevant statistics.
2. If appropriate, include a story, anecdote, or quotes to highlight and humanize key points.
3. Script the opening and closing of your testimony, which can include a summary, a question, a very brief (related) story, a quotation, an important statistic, or something else that is relevant and memorable.
4. Prepare possible questions that the decision-makers might ask. Then, prepare your answers to these questions. Learn how to “talk” your answers in conversational and respectful language, phrasing, and pausing.

5. Prior to the meeting, learn how much time you will be allotted and when the item appears on the agenda. This will help you in preparing your remarks and planning your attendance.
6. If possible, find out specifics about speaking arrangements and environmental factors that might impact your experience.
7. Practice. Practice. Practice. This includes practicing your remarks and your answers to possible questions that the decision-makers might ask.
8. Be prepared to respond to requests for additional conversations or opportunities to present or discuss your message.
9. Follow up with thank you notes to appropriate people who helped you prepare for the meeting, as well as pre- and post-meeting opportunities.