

Examples of Tips for Testifying (compiled January 2020)

Colorado

<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/Create%20a%20Public%20Participation%20in%20the%20Legislative%20Process%20Document160416.pdf>

Committee Protocol

The purpose of a committee hearing is to gather information so that the committee can make an informed recommendation on a given bill or resolution. Public input is an important part of this process. As elected officials, committee members appreciate hearing the perspective of citizens and organizations on issues.

Preparing to testify. When preparing your testimony, plan to present in less than five minutes and be prepared to summarize the main points in one minute. If you have a personal experience related to the legislation, your story can provide valuable information for the legislators. However, be aware that the bill sponsor may propose amendments when presenting to the committee that may change your position on the bill. If you would like to suggest an amendment, it is best to speak with the bill sponsor prior to the committee hearing. **It is a good idea to bring a copy of the bill with you to the hearing, and strongly recommended that you bring copies of your written testimony for the committee members, bills sponsors, and staff. If you are not sure how many copies to bring, 20 copies will be sufficient.**

Signing in. Hearings usually start on time, but it is best to arrive 30 minutes early, especially for committees that meet Upon Adjournment. In order to testify, it is important that you sign in at the beginning of the hearing or as soon as possible. Each bill on the agenda will have a sign-in sheet that is located on or near the committee table. Fill out all of the information including whether you are in support of the bill, against the bill, or neutral. If you are not representing an organization, write that you are representing yourself. If you have any questions, please ask a member of Legislative Council Staff, who wear red name badges. If you have handouts or copies of your testimony for the committee, give these to staff at the beginning of the hearing or before you speak.

Testifying. The order of bills to be heard is posted outside the door of each committee that is meeting. The chair will announce each bill, after which the bill's sponsor will address the committee. The chair may then ask for testimony from proponents and opponents. Hearings are conducted using formal parliamentary procedure. You may find the following recommendations to be helpful.

- Begin your presentation by stating, "Mr. or Madam Chair ____, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. My name is ____, representing ____, and I am here to support/oppose this bill because . . ."
- Do not read your testimony word for word.
- Be brief and avoid repeating what other witnesses have said. Try to focus on points that have not been mentioned.
- At the end of your testimony, thank the committee members and offer to answer any questions.
- If a member asks a question, wait for the chair to prompt you, then state your name followed by, "Chair ____, Senator/Representative ____, the answer to your question is . . ." If you do not know the answer, it is always okay to say that you do not know. If you promise to follow-up, be sure to do so in a timely manner.

- Do not be offended if committee members come and go during a hearing. They have other commitments, including the presentation of bills in other committees that are meeting simultaneously. • At a hearing with a large number of witnesses, there may not be time for everyone to testify.
- Cell phones and other electronic devices should be on a silent setting.
- Food and beverages are prohibited in the committee rooms.
- The chair has the discretion and authority to limit testimony, ask the sergeant-at-arms to remove a disruptive person from the committee, and clear the public from any hearing in the event of a disturbance which is disruptive to legislative proceedings.

Minnesota

<https://www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/fac/fac?id=117>

Here are 10 suggestions to make it easier to get involved:

1. **Arrive early.** Getting to the meeting early will give you a chance to survey the meeting space, identify legislators, and make last-minute changes to your presentation.
2. **Contact the committee's administrator or legislative assistant.** If you want to testify, make sure you are on the committee meeting agenda. It's best to contact the committee a day or two before the hearing to do this. But, time permitting, it's possible to sign up and testify on same day of the hearing.
3. **Introduce yourself.** When speaking to the committee, clearly identify yourself and the organization you represent, if any. Then clearly state your position on the bill before the committee.
4. **Speak through the committee chair.** All questions and answers during committee hearings are routed through the committee chair. Address the chair as "Madame Chair" or "Mr. Chair." This makes it easier to follow the testimony when listening to tapes of recorded committee meetings.
5. **Don't be intimidated.** This is a citizen Legislature. Representatives are your friends and neighbors and they want to hear what you have to say. Just state your case clearly and in simple terms as you would to anyone.
6. **Be brief.** Make your key points as concisely as possible. Provide specific information about why your position is in the state's best interest. Legislators may want to know what, if anything, has been done in other states, what the costs might be, and what groups support or oppose your proposal. If you know the answers, include them in your statement.
7. **Be prepared to answer questions.** The best way to make your case is to provide straightforward answers to legislators' questions. If you don't know the answer, say so. If possible, find the answer and pass it on to committee members.
8. **Bring written summaries.** You may want to have copies of a concise summary of your key points to hand out to legislators, staff and the news media. Some legislators say a clearly written letter, or issue sheet, is the most effective way of gaining support.
9. **Offer to help.** Citizens play a key role in shaping state policy. Ask if there is anything you can do to help get the proposal in question approved or defeated.
10. **Display mutual respect.** Your views are important and you have a right to be treated courteously by all members and staff. Likewise, legislators are more apt to respond to polite treatment than to browbeating. There are many sides to every issue and each one has merit. Understand the difficult position legislators have in reaching their decisions.

Nebraska

<https://nebraskalegislature.gov/about/testifying.php>

Testimony Tips

- Be aware that sometimes the sponsor of a bill will offer amendments when he or she presents the bill to the committee. These proposed amendments may change the way you feel about the bill and, thus, affect your testimony.
- Be prepared to limit your testimony and try not to repeat testimony offered by previous witnesses. Remember that while senators want to hear what you have to say, there are numerous witnesses who also want to be heard.
- Be prepared to answer questions asked by committee members.
- Most observers agree that, as a witness, you will be more effective in getting your message across if you have prepared your testimony in writing. If you do this, it is helpful to bring enough copies to distribute to all committee members, the two committee staff members, media and the transcribers' office. Fifteen copies is usually enough to accomplish this. If written testimony is lengthy, it can be distributed and summarized orally to conserve the committee's time.
- Addressing committee members or witnesses from the audience, public demonstrations and applause are prohibited.
- You should not be offended if senators come and go during a hearing. They have other commitments, including the presentation of bills in other committees that are meeting simultaneously.

North Dakota

<https://www.legis.nd.gov/general-information>

Before the Hearing You Should...

- Find out when and where your bill will be heard. Be on time for the hearing. Usually, once a hearing is closed on a particular bill, no further testimony is heard.
- Plan your testimony. It is not necessary, but it is helpful, to have written copies of your comments available.
- See if other persons will be testifying on your bill. If so, try to coordinate your testimony before the hearing to avoid duplication.
- Contact the Secretary of State's office if you are going to testify on behalf of anyone but yourself to see if you must register as a lobbyist.

At the Hearing You Should...

- Be present at the start of the hearing. All persons present usually get a chance to speak, but sometimes because of large turnouts it is not possible to give everyone a chance to speak. If you do not get a chance to testify, your presence may be acknowledged and you might be asked if you favor or oppose the bill. Also, you can always submit written testimony.
- Sign the witness sheet at the lectern. Give the bill number, whether you favor or oppose the bill, your name, your lobbyist registration number if you have one, and who you represent if other than yourself.
- Wait your turn. The chairman announces the beginning of the hearing on a particular bill. The clerk will read the bill. The first speaker is usually the bill's sponsor. The chairman then asks for testimony first from proponents and then opponents.
- Plan on following the custom (although it is not absolutely necessary) of beginning your remarks by addressing the chairman and committee members, giving your name and address, and why you are

there. For example: "Mr. or Madam Chairman and members of the committee, my name is John Q. Public from Edwinton. I'm in favor of this bill because, etc."

- Be brief. Do not repeat what others have said. The hearings are informal so be conversational. Avoid being too technical. Avoid using acronyms or technical references unless you first explain what they mean.
- Do not be nervous or worried about doing something wrong. There are no "rights and wrongs" about testifying. Legislators are just your friends and neighbors who want to hear what you have to say.
- Expect some questions and comments from committee members. These questions are not designed to embarrass you but merely to provide additional information.
- Avoid any clapping, cheering, booing, or other demonstrations.

After the Hearing...

- Some committees vote right after a hearing. Others wait until the end of the meeting. Some postpone voting until another meeting.
- All committee action is public so you can stay to listen to committee debate and its vote even though the public comment portion of the hearing is over.
- One or two days later you can check with the committee clerk, your legislator, or the legislative information kiosk to find out how the committee voted on your bill.

Oregon

<https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/committees/Pages/How-To-Testify.aspx>

Know Your Audience

- Committee members are "citizen legislators," and they want to hear your comments.
- Be respectful of committee members as well as other people who come to testify.
- Do not scold or insult members or other witnesses, or accuse members of causing your issue. This may alienate members from your cause.

Know the Issue

- Draw from your own knowledge and experience.
- Support personal opinions with as many facts as possible.
- Be knowledgeable of the "other side of the story." You may be asked to discuss how and why your opinion differs from others.

Be Familiar with the Committee Process

- Know the location of the building and meeting room, and be sure of the meeting time.
- Agendas are posted outside the meeting room. Check the agenda to make sure the bill you are interested in has not been removed or rescheduled. Bills are not always heard in the order in which they appear on the agenda.
- If possible, attend a committee meeting before you testify to learn about the process. You can also watch videos of past meetings on OLIS.
- When you arrive at the public hearing, print your name legibly on the witness registration sheet for the appropriate bill. Witnesses may be called out of order. Do not sign up if you only wish to watch the meeting.
- Visit the legislative website (OLIS) at oregonlegislature.gov to learn more about committees.

Presenting Your Written Testimony

- Email your written testimony and any materials (reports, handouts, presentations) at least 24 hours in advance so it can be posted electronically to OLIS for the members and public to view. However, written testimony is not required.
- If you did not submit materials in advance, give your paper copies to committee staff—not directly to the members—after you are called and before you begin speaking.
- Address members formally (e.g., Senator Jones, Representative Brown). Respond to questions through the chair (e.g., ‘Chair Jones and members of the committee...’).
- State your name, city or county, and any other affiliation for the record, even if you’ve already been introduced or called upon by name.
- Clearly state whether you support or oppose the bill and briefly explain your reason.
- If you submitted written testimony, do not read it word-for-word to members. Make an outline and summarize the main points of the testimony.
- Keep in mind that many people testifying on a busy agenda may require you to summarize your testimony in two minutes.
- When finished, thank the members and offer to answer any questions.
- Members realize that the process may be intimidating; they do not expect perfect presentations.
- **Testifying as a group:** Select a few people to cover different topics so the testimony is not repetitive. Address the problem, possible solutions, and your group’s solution. Check with committee staff to determine how much time will be allotted for testimony on the bill.
- Verbal testimony and written materials are public records available to the public on the Internet. Use discretion on what personal information to include.

Utah

<https://le.utah.gov/documents/aboutthelegislature/TestifyingbeforeaLegislativeCommittee.htm>

Four Suggestions to Enhance Your Appearance before a Legislative Committee

1. Know Your Audience

The members of the committee are “citizen legislators.” In addition to their public service, they have full-time jobs. They are farmers, public employees, doctors, lawyers, homemakers, craftsmen, and a host of other occupations and professions. They are a cross section of Utah’s society. They are your neighbors and friends.

Be courteous.

Don't accuse committee members of causing your particular problem.

Resist the temptation to scold, put down, or insult the decision-makers or other witnesses. This tactic will likely alienate them from your cause.

2. Know the Issue

Support your personal opinions with clear, understandable facts.

Be knowledgeable of the other side of the story. You may be asked to discuss the differences.

Draw from your own knowledge and experience.

3. Be Familiar with the Committee Process

Know the meeting time and location. Meeting times and locations are found on the meeting agenda. Agendas are posted 24 hours in advance of the meeting on the third floor of the State Capitol building or they can be located at [the legislative home page](#) on the Internet.

Check to make sure the issue you are following has not been removed from the agenda.

Agenda items may not be heard in the order in which they appear.

Contact the staff policy analyst in advance of the meeting to request permission to testify and to be placed on the committee chair's list of those wishing to speak.

If possible, attend a committee meeting before you testify to become familiar with the process and room layout.

4. Prepare Your Written Testimony and Oral Presentation

Give copies of your testimony to the committee staff before you begin your presentation.

Begin your presentation by addressing the chairperson first, then members of the committee. "Chair _____, members of the committee" For the record, state your name, address, and the organization or group you represent.

State your purpose for testifying. Do not read your testimony to the committee word for word. Prepare an outline.

Be prepared to summarize your testimony in one minute--that may be all the time you are allowed.

Thank the committee members and offer to answer any questions.

When a member asks you a question, respond: "Chair (last name) or Senator/Representative (last name), the answer to your question is"

Relax. The committee understands that this can be an intimidating experience--they don't expect a perfect presentation.

Washington

<http://leg.wa.gov/legislature/Pages/Testify.aspx>

Committee Hearings

Legislative hearings are conducted informally. The rules are somewhat relaxed, but are intended to help preserve decorum and allow respectful, courteous debate. (Reminders of hearing room rules are [here](#) for the House and [here](#) for the Senate.) Anyone can testify; you do not need formal training.

To find out when a hearing is scheduled:

- Click [Schedules of committee hearings](#) to obtain electronic copy of the weekly and daily schedules.
- Go to the Legislative Information Center, 110 Legislative Building, to get paper copies.
- Call the toll-free Legislative Hotline number (1.800.562.6000).

- Inquire in person or by phone in the Legislative Information Center 110 Legislative Building (360-786-7573).
- Subscribe to the [Legislature's Committee E-mail Notification Service](#).

The Legislative Information Center also has copies of bills for distribution. Be sure to ask for any pending amendments or substitutes to particular bills. LIC will make copies for free for the first 30 pages; after 30 pages the charge is 15 cents per page.

Notices of interim committee hearings are sent out by committees between legislative sessions and are available via the Legislature's Committee E-mail Notification Service (Listserv).

Before the Hearing

Are You a Lobbyist? Generally, if you are testifying on a bill or issues and represent only yourself, you will not be required to register as a lobbyist.

A [Public Disclosure Commission](#) (PDC) brochure outlines guidelines on this subject:

You do not have to register and report if you:

1. appear only before public meetings of legislative committees or state agencies, or
2. do not receive pay, expenses or other consideration for lobbying and make no expenditure for on behalf of a legislator, elected official or state employee in connection with lobbying, or
3. restrict your lobbying to four days during any three-month period and spend no more than \$35 for or on behalf of a legislator, elected official or state employee.

A copy of the PDC brochure is available through the Legislative Information Center, or you may check with the PDC if you're uncertain. The PDC provides [online information for lobbyists](#) as well.

Prepare Your Remarks. Time is usually limited, so be brief and direct. Written testimony should not be read at committee hearings. **Committee staff will distribute copies of written testimony to members of the committee if you bring a sufficient number -- one for each member.** Writing your comments in outline form will be helpful when you speak, and you should summarize your written testimony.

Avoid Duplication. If other persons will be offering similar testimony at the hearing, try to coordinate your testimony and avoid duplication. Well organized testimony is the most effective.

At the Meeting

- Be punctual; usually there is only one public hearing at which testimony is taken on a particular bill.
- Sign-in is now done electronically in all committees. You may:
 - (1) Go to one of the Committee Sign-In kiosks located in the main hallway of the Cherberg Building and the O'Brien Building, each Senate and House hearing room, or the first floor of the Legislative Building and the Pritchard Building; or
 - (2) Access the [Committee Sign-In Program](#) from a web-enabled device (smartphone, laptop or tablet), only while on campus and connected to the Legislature's WSLPublic wireless Internet network
- Click [Committee Electronic Sign-In Instructions](#) to obtain more detailed instructions or for information on how to create an optional Committee Sign-In account.
- Check to see if copies of proposed amendments or substitute bills are available.
- Take your written materials to the committee staff for distribution.
- Talk to the committee staff if you are going to be using the presentation equipment.

How the Meeting Is Conducted

Be present at the beginning of the hearing. The committee chair will open the hearing on a particular bill. Frequently, opening comments will be made by the bill's sponsor or by committee staff. Sometimes, however, the chair will ask for testimony from proponents and opponents immediately.

The chair will organize the hearing to ensure

1. that the committee members hear relevant information,
2. that interested persons are given the opportunity to express their positions, and
3. that the hearing does not exceed the time available.

Most committee hearings are limited to two hours and may have several matters pending. The chair will attempt to be fair and provide each person an opportunity to testify. It may be necessary, however, to restrict testimony so that everyone is given an opportunity to express his or her opinions. You may be called to testify with others to save time.

Making Your Remarks

1. Begin by introducing yourself to the chair and committee members and stating your purpose. For example,

"Mr. or Madam Chair and members of the committee, I am John Doe from Spokane. I am here representing myself. I support this bill because . . ."

2. In your opening remarks, make it clear whether you are representing other citizens or a separate group.
3. Be brief and be sure your remarks are clear. Avoid being too technical and do not repeat previously made remarks. You do not need to be nervous or worried about how you present your testimony.
4. Be prepared for questions and comments from committee members. These are designed to gain additional information, but don't answer if you are not sure of the answer. Tell the members you will send a written answer to the committee, and then follow through.
5. Restrict yourself to your testimony. Abstain from other overt demonstrations such as clapping, cheering, booing, etc.

Wisconsin

http://lc.legis.wisconsin.gov/media/1389/citizen_testify_final.pdf

IMPORTANT RULES

- The purpose of a hearing is to educate the committee members. You may speak to them and they may ask questions of you, but witnesses and members of the audience do not ask questions of the committee or staff.
- Applause, cheering, booing, waving signs, or other expressions of sentiment are not allowed. In addition to maintaining an appropriate level of decorum, this rule is necessary to ensure that everyone, regardless of point of view, has the opportunity to address the committee without intimidation.

TIPS FOR TESTIFYING

- Keep your testimony brief and to the point--a general rule of thumb is not more than five minutes, preferably less. Note that in long hearings, the chair may limit testimony, often to only three minutes.

Agenda Item V-B

- Make your testimony personal. Tell the committee how the bill would affect you or how you came to be personally concerned about the subject. Discussing abstract concepts or statistics may be helpful, but a personal story often is appreciated by committee members.
- Try not to read your testimony to the committee.
- Do not repeat what other speakers have said, especially in a long hearing when numerous speakers have already said essentially what you plan to say. Instead, state your general point of view and indicate that you support the views expressed by previous speakers with that point of view, adding any thoughts of your own that may be new or different.
- If the hearing is long and you cannot stay to the end, notify the committee clerk (through the page) and request to be called early. Such requests usually are granted to the extent possible.
- Some questions from committee members will be more a statement than a question. You do not need to respond, but may take the opportunity to comment further.
- Be respectful to everyone in the room--the committee members, staff, other speakers, and anyone else present. It is possible to disagree in the strongest terms while remaining courteous.