



Guidelines for Public Hearing Testimony

Public hearings are held so that legislative committees can collect public comment and gather facts on the budget bills they are considering. They are an important opportunity for people to speak directly to the committee about issues that are important to them and they help legislators make decisions in the public interest.

How to Write and Present Testimony

While there are different types of testimony, the basic structure breaks down like this:

- Introduce yourself and the organization you represent (if applicable)
- State whether you support or oppose specific budget priorities and give a few reasons why
- Tell a story to illustrate why you support the issue
- Wrap up and thank the hearing body

Rule of thumb: three to five minutes or less.

Try to make eye contact with legislators during your testimony.

Different styles of testimony

My story

- Effective because it comes across as sincere, is usually straightforward and easy to understand.
- Easiest to prepare because you are expressing your own feelings and relating your experiences.

The facts

- More technical and requires more preparation.
- Explain the issue using facts, figures, background materials, quotes from experts and other references that will substantiate your opinion.

Expert Testimony

- Presented by people who are considered experts in their field.
- Usually limited to court proceedings or to “trial-like” administrative hearings, although occasionally legislative committees call for expert witnesses.

Guidelines for writing testimony

- Identify your organization, the Bill name and number or issue, the committee or governmental body and your position.
- State your opinion on the issue in a summary paragraph at the top of the testimony.
- Explain what the budget policy would do and why you oppose or support it.
- Offer other solutions or alternatives if there are any.
- Make your testimony succinct. Avoid extra words.
- Ask the body to support your position: “Therefore, I urge the committees to support this policy/bill/priority.”

Guidelines for testifying

- Identify yourself clearly. This is your best opportunity to demonstrate how the issue affects you.
- Sign up early. You want to speak as early as possible while the committee is fresh.
- The sign-up sheet is located outside the hearing room one or two hours before the hearing begins.
- Submit written testimony. You should give committee staff your written testimony, with enough copies for all committee members, before the hearing so that they can distribute it to the committee. Your written testimony can make the points that you did not have time to make in your presentation.
- Be brief. Three to five minutes is a courteous length. Choose only your key points.
- Don’t repeat what others before you have said.
- Be unique. Try to use personal experiences.
- Don’t read but use notes for guidance; a relaxed conversational style is more effective.
- Dress for success. Business attire is appropriate to demonstrate respect for the committee.
- Bring supporters. It can be very effective to bring a large group of people to a hearing as a show of support.
- Wait briefly after you finish for questions from committee members. If you do not know the answer, offer to get them an answer later.
- Prepare typed copies of your statement. In the event of a highly controversial issue, you may wish to distribute them to the press.
- Visual Aids. Consider the possibility of visual aids for effect. Check with committee staff in advance for approval.