

TIPS FOR TESTIFYING BEFORE A LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

- Testifying before a legislative committee will be a positive experience for you if you follow some simple rules and prepare ahead of time.
- Effective testimony should not be a frightening or intimidating experience, but rather the use of common sense, personal relations and communication skills in a more formal setting.

Rules of the Road:

1. **Know the purpose and approach for your testimony.** Understand why you are testifying - whether you are there to persuade, dissuade, provide "expert" information, or delay action on a bill. Remember that committees are rarely persuaded on testimony alone. It is possible committee members have decided how they will vote before the hearing. Your testimony is intended to avoid losing votes and to justify previously decided positions. You may be advised to address the concerns only of those legislators who are undecided. If you are testifying at the request of an organization, consult with the staff and their lobbyist about your testimony. Coordinating efforts with those who share your opinion on the bill is critical!
2. **Carefully prepare your testimony.** Know your subject. Have accurate facts or data to support your arguments. Never "wing it". Keep your testimony short and to the point. The best testimony is about three minutes, but certainly less than five minutes. Be sure to notify the sponsor of the bill that you will be testifying, even if you are not supporting him/her. Legislators do not like to be surprised by testimony, especially if you are raising new issues/concerns.
3. **Establish rapport with the committee.** Wait to be acknowledged by the Chair before speaking. Start by saying, "Thank you Madam (or Mister) Chair." When you begin, briefly introduce yourself. If you are a constituent of any committee member, identify where you live, but don't single out your legislator.
4. **Present your testimony effectively.** Use a friendly, relaxed tone of voice. Avoid a monologue or a formal speech. Be conversational. Do not read to the committee. Practice several times before the hearing, so you are familiar with your tone, the flow, and your material.
5. **Keep it simple (KIS).** Don't use jargon or specific terminology. If the underlying issues are complicated, simplify them before you talk. Use examples to emphasize and illustrate your points.
6. **Answer questions briefly and cautiously.** Be aware that legislators may ask questions to help reinforce their own opinions and possibly to discredit your or previous testimony. Some legislators' questions are meant to help you make a better case or explain something that was confusing. Prepare yourself for possible questions by finding out what concerns have been raised about the bill and the opinions of legislators on the committee. Answer questions briefly and stick to the topic of the question. If you do not know the answer to a question, just say so, but offer to obtain the information requested and provide it to committee members.