

Civic Engagement: Tips for Presenting Testimony in Committee



Dress your professional best. Remember, if the goal is to be taken seriously, you'll want to look the part. Business professional attire is appropriate in this setting.



Turn your cell phone OFF before entering any committee hearing. It is considered very poor etiquette to use your cell phone during committee proceedings.



Be prepared to WAIT. The best way to reduce your idle time is to arrive early and sign up right away to testify (you will write your name clearly and designate whether you support, oppose or are neutral on a bill). The sign-in sheet for testimony will be called up to speak one by one on a first-come, first-served basis. Calendars change frequently, making them difficult to plan a busy day around. Just remind yourself that nothing worth having ever comes easy.

If you have any presentation materials to distribute, bring at least 15 copies to provide one for each member and legislative staff member present. A member of the Sergeant at Arms staff will distribute them to committee and relevant staff members for you (you can bring extras for the public if you like, but don't expect a staff member to help you distribute them to the crowd).

When you are called to the stand: state your name and who you represent (it can be yourself or an organization).

From the beginning to end of your testimony, a good rule of thumb is NEVER to speak until spoken to. This includes your introduction and dismissal from the stand. ALWAYS wait to speak until recognized by the Committee chair.

Commence your testimony by making a clear and direct statement about your position on the bill and why the committee should support your position. Think of this as an argumentative essay: you will touch on important points, present quantitative and qualitative research, and make a clear case for your side. Keep your testimony presentation in the range of 2-5 minutes.

When your testimony is completed, be prepared to answer questions from committee members.



Throughout your testimony and Q&A, ALWAYS address the chair of the committee as "Madame Chair" or "Mister Chairman" and all other committee members as "Representative [Last Name]" or "Senator [Last Name]" any time you speak (they will each have nameplates to help you).

When your testimony is complete and there are no questions, the Committee Chair will dismiss you. At this point you can simply say "thank you" and leave the stand.