

RAISE YOUR VOICE

Public Testimony 101

Tips for delivering a strong public testimony
on the issues you care about

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Preparing for a Public Hearing

- **Determine the time limit for testimonies:** It is commonly 2-3 minutes, but may differ from one hearing to another, so be sure to check before you prepare your testimony. You may want to prepare a 3 minute version, a 2 minute version, and a 1 minute version of the same testimony, as time limits may be shortened in the middle of a hearing.
- **Get there early:** You'll want to get your name on the speaker's list and get a good seat in the main chamber as early as possible.
- **Familiarize yourself with who you will be speaking to:** Is it a committee? Is it a state agency? Who is the chair? You'll want to address your comments to the chair and committee members, so be sure you know who they are and what to expect from them. Some committee members may be joining by phone.
- **Be prepared for questions:** The committee may ask you questions after your testimony, based on what you said. It's a good idea to be prepared with back-up data or documentation if relevant.
- **Know who is testifying before you:** Be ready when they call the person before you, especially if sitting outside the main chamber, so you can be where you need to be when it's your turn.
- **Bring:**
 - At least one copy of your testimony to hand to the note-taker when you have completed your statements (you may want to bring additional copies for each of the committee members)
 - A pen – you may want to make changes, as you hear other people speak
 - A snack if you need one, and water (it could be a long hearing)

Crafting a Great Public Testimony

- **Make three points and tell a story:** There will be several testimonies. You want yours to stand out and to be both clear and memorable. The best testimony at public hearings makes three points, and incorporates a personal story to show how your points are relevant to your life. Make sure those listening to you understand why this issue is important to you. Try answering these questions.
 - What is the issue? (Problem)
 - Why do you care? (Importance)
 - What do you want the committee members to do? (Solution)

- **Be concise:**
 - You will be limited to a few minutes, but don't feel that you have to fill them.
 - The hearing may last several hours and attention spans may wane.
 - Make sure to use facts, accurate information, and if possible bring sources to back it up (or reference them on your written copy).
 - Make your points clear, brief, and to the point.
 - A clearly presented, concise argument can be very powerful.
- **Keep it simple:**
 - Make sure it's clear where you stand from the start.
 - Have a single message that you consistently present.
 - Sum up your statements at the end to re-emphasize your single issue, if you have time.
- **Be compelling:**
 - Speak from the heart.
 - Talk about how the policy question affects you and others like you.
 - Great testimony is both logical and emotional.
 - Do not be afraid to be passionate – it can be very persuasive, as long as you are not yelling.
 - Do not be afraid to be creative – finding new ways to make your testimony stand out can go a long way.
- **Be polite:**
 - Face the committee members.
 - Address the chair and committee members by their titles.
 - Introduce yourself - include your name, address, and if you are representing a community, neighborhood, or membership base (if you can add a number of people, that will strengthen your comments, *ex: I am here on behalf of the 150 residents of Star Hill*).
 - Thank the committee members for the opportunity to speak at the beginning or end.
- **Listen to the testimonies before yours:**
 - Try not to repeat what others have said.
 - Instead, you can support previous testimonies and add to them.

