HOW TO

Prepare and Give Testimony

Giving testimony is one of the most powerful ways to educate legislators and policymakers about how proposed laws affect you, your community, or your organization. Your story and perspective can help lawmakers understand the real impact of policy decisions and influence how they vote.

Before You Begin

- Testimony can be spoken, written, or both. You don't need to be an expert, just speak from your experience.
- Keep your remarks brief and focused, generally no more than 2–3 minutes.
- If you are uncomfortable speaking, you can still share your story through written testimony or by attending the hearing to show support.
- You can email or mail written testimony to the committee before the hearing date.
- Even if you don't speak, your presence matters! Showing up in person demonstrates strong community engagement.

Step 1: Writing Your Testimony

Start by writing out what you plan to say. This helps you organize your message and stay within time limits.

Suggested Outline

- **Introduce yourself:** Share your name and city or organization (if applicable). Example: "Good morning Chairperson [Name] and members of the committee. My name is [Your Name], and I live in [City]."
- **State your position:** Say clearly if you support or oppose the legislation, and mention the bill name or number if known.
- **Explain why the issue matters:** Use a mix of facts and personal experience. Example: "As a parent, I've seen how access to affordable childcare affects working families."
- **Share your story:** A short, personal example is powerful. Be concise and authentic.
- **Conclude strongly:** Summarize your main point and restate your request. Example: "I urge you to support policies that strengthen families across South Carolina."
- **Thank the committee:** Always end by expressing appreciation for their time.

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Step 2: Practice and Prepare

- Time yourself. Keep remarks within the allowed limit (usually 2–3 minutes).
- Practice aloud. Rehearse until it sounds natural and conversational.
- Bring copies. Print 5–10 copies of your written testimony to distribute to committee members or staff.
- Highlight key points. Use notecards or an outline to stay on track instead of reading word-for-word.
- Dress professionally. Business or business-casual attire shows respect for the process.

Step 3: At the Hearing

- Check in and sign up to speak when you arrive.
- Stay patient. Testifiers are often called in order of signup. You may wait before speaking.
- Speak clearly and respectfully. Face the committee and speak into the microphone. If others have made your same point, say: “I agree with the testimony shared earlier and urge the committee to take action.”
- Expect questions. Legislators may ask follow-up questions. Answer only what you know and it’s okay to say, “I don’t know, but I can follow up.”
- Maintain decorum. Do not engage with other speakers or debate. Stay calm, even if opposing views are presented.
- End with gratitude. Thank the committee for their time and for hearing your perspective.

Step 4: If You Prefer Written Testimony

If you don’t wish to speak publicly, you can submit your testimony in writing:

- Email your statement to the appropriate committee’s public address.
- Mail it to the committee office. Address it to the Research Director or Committee Chair, and include your contact information.
- Submit your written testimony before the hearing date (usually 1–2 business days in advance).
- Written testimony is included in the official record and read by staff or committee members.

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Step 5: After You Testify

- Follow up. Send a thank-you email to committee members or staff.
- Share your story. Connect with your organization or advocacy partners — they can help amplify your message beyond the hearing.
- Stay involved. Track the bill's progress and be ready to testify again if it moves forward.

Tips for Success

- Keep it brief, honest, and focused.
- Avoid jargon or reading long statistics.
- Stay calm and confident, even if others disagree.
- Your voice matters. Whether you speak, attend, or write, you are part of the democratic process.