



Testify

Another way to voice your concerns is to provide testimony during committee meetings. Committees primarily focus hearings on particular bills, though occasionally they discuss issues of broad interest within the committee's jurisdiction.

Testimony can be submitted in written form or can be given in person before the committee. Typically, you must be invited to testify live before the committee, but you can be proactive about getting that invitation.

The best way to do that is to contact the committee administrator. Introduce yourself and your concerns; ask how the committee works and whether or not public testimony is needed. The committee administrator will help you know when and how to prepare and submit your testimony, and will put you on the agenda. It's best to contact the committee a day or two before the hearing to do this. But, time permitting, it's possible to sign up and testify on same day of the hearing. (See www.parentsunited.org/Committees to look up the Committee Administrators.)

Questions to Ask:

- I'm concerned about _____. Is the committee looking for people to testify on this issue?
- When will this issue be on the committee's schedule? (General timeframe.)
- Would it be better to testify in person or submit my concerns in writing?
- What's the advance deadline for getting copies in committee member packets? How should I submit my statement? (E-mail works.)

Written Statements

Should include the following:

- Your contact information;
- A clear presentation of your Key Messages;
- Personal experience and/or data to support your position.

Consider:

- Including data, news articles and locally-developed resources (fact sheets); and
- A conclusion that reviews your basic position.

Keep in mind that your written statement will become part of the official record and can be longer than your oral statement.

Oral Testimony

Your oral statement is an opportunity to summarize your written testimony. Effective oral testimony includes the following elements:

- A brief introduction, including who you are and your involvement in the issue;
- An easily understood, five minute statement focused on the issue before the committee;
- A clear statement of your top 3-5 main points of agreement or disagreement with what is being discussed;
- Changes you would like made;
- Real examples of people who will be affected by the matter being discussed and how they will be affected; and
- A rebuttal of the main counter arguments (if known)

Make Your Statement Easy to Read

- Use a large font
- Do NOT use all caps (they aren't as easy to read)
- Double space
- Leave wide margins
- Leave a very, very wide footer (about a third of the page) so that when you read the statement, your eyes/head will not bow down to look at the bottom of the page
- Use indents or "overhanging indents" for each paragraph start, or even each sentence
- Print only on one side of each page
- Never split a sentence between 2 pages

10 Tips for Successful Testimony

1. **Arrive Early.** Getting to the meeting early will give you a chance to survey the terrain, identify legislators, and to make last-minute changes to your presentation.
2. **Introduce Yourself.** When speaking to the committee, clearly identify yourself and the organization you represent, if any. Then clearly state your position on the bill before the committee.
3. **Speak Through the Committee Chair.** All questions and answers during committee hearings are routed through the committee chair. Address the chair as "Madame Chair" or "Mr. Chair." This makes it easier to follow the testimony when listening to tapes of recorded committee meetings.
4. **Don't be Intimidated.** This is a citizen Legislature. Representatives are your friends and neighbors and they want to hear what you have to say. Just state your case clearly and in simple terms as you would to anyone.
5. **Be Brief.** Make your key points as concisely as possible. Provide specific information about why your position is in the state's best interest. Legislators may want to know what, if anything, has been done in other states, what the costs might be, and what groups support or oppose your proposal. If you know the answers, include them in your statement.
6. **Be Prepared to Answer Questions.** The best way to make your case is to provide straightforward answers to legislators' questions. If you don't know the answer, say so. If possible, find the answer and pass it on to committee members.
7. **Written Summaries.** You may want to have copies of a concise summary of your key points to hand out to legislators, staff and the news media. Some legislators say a clearly written letter, or issue sheet, is the most effective way of gaining support.
8. **Offer to Help.** Citizens play a key role in shaping state policy. Ask if there is anything you can do to help get the proposal in question approved or defeated.
9. **Mutual Respect.** Your views are important and you have a right to be treated courteously by all members and staff. Likewise, legislators are more apt to respond to polite treatment than to browbeating. There are many sides to every issue and each one has merit. Understand the difficult position legislators have in reaching their decisions.

If you need accommodations such as sign language interpreters or large print materials, call (651) 296-4860 as far in advance as possible.

Tell Your Story

(an easy-to-use outline for preparing your statement)

The community, legislators, school board members and other decision-makers need to hear about what's happening in your school!

Here's a quick outline that can help you tell your story in a clear and concise way. When you tell your story, speak (or write) from your heart!

1. **Introduce your story** (2-3 sentences).
Set the stage for your story by providing:
 - Your full name (even if you've been introduced)
 - City or town of residence; and
 - Name and ages of the people in your story

Then state your main message. This tells them why you are about to tell them this story!

2. **Tell your story** – (4-8 sentences)
 - Explain the **CHALLENGE** that you face
 - Explain the **ACTION** that would help you address that challenge
 - Tell what kind of **RESULT** could be achieved due to the action
3. **Wrap it up!** (3-5 sentences)
 - Tell how your result would benefit other families, the community, and the state.
 - State your main message again.
 - Tell them what you want them to do about it.
 - Say thank you!