

TESTIFYING BEFORE A LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

Citizen Participation In Committee Hearings Impacts Government Policy

Legislative committees lie at the heart of Utah's legislative process. Committee meetings are open to the public and provide a forum for citizens to express their views about proposed legislation, budgets, and other public policy issues.

Public testimony may influence the committee's action. It also becomes part of the permanent record and may be used in future research.

Well-prepared public testimony before a legislative committee can be exciting and fulfilling.

Four Suggestions to Enhance Your Appearance before a Legislative Committee

1. Know Your Audience.

The members of the committee are "citizen legislators." In addition to their public service, they have full-time jobs. They are farmers, public employees, doctors, lawyers, homemakers, craftsmen, and a host of other occupations and professions. They are a cross section of Utah's society. They are your neighbors and friends.

Be courteous.

Don't accuse committee members of causing your particular problem.

Resist the temptation to scold, put down, or insult the decision-makers or other witnesses. This tactic will likely alienate them from your cause.

2. Know the Issue.

Support your personal opinions with clear, understandable facts.

Be knowledgeable of the "other side of the story." You may be asked to discuss the differences.

Draw from your own knowledge and experience.

3. Be Familiar with the Committee Process

Know the meeting time and location. Meeting times and locations are found on the meeting agenda.

Agendas are posted 24 hours in advance of the meeting on the third floor of the State Capitol building or they can be located at [the legislative home page](#) on the Internet.

Check to make sure the issue you are following has not been removed from the agenda.

Agenda items may not be heard in the order in which they appear.

Contact the staff policy analyst in advance of the meeting to request permission to testify and to be placed on the committee chair's list of those wishing to speak.

If possible, attend a committee meeting before you testify to become familiar with the process and room layout.

4. Prepare Your Written Testimony and Oral Presentation

Give copies of your testimony to the committee staff before you begin your presentation.

Begin your presentation by addressing the chairperson first, then members of the committee. "Chair _____, members of the committee"

For the record, state your name, address, and the organization or group you represent.

State your purpose for testifying. Do not read your testimony to the committee word for word. Prepare an outline.

Be prepared to summarize your testimony in one minute--that may be all the time you are allowed.

Thank the committee members and offer to answer any questions.

When a member asks you a question, respond: "Chair (last name) or Senator/Representative (last name), the answer to your question is"

Relax. The committee understands that this can be an intimidating experience--they don't expect a perfect presentation.

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