



# Advocacy Toolkit

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## Tips for Testifying in Committee

After you've submitted your testimony (see our one pager on [Tips for Drafting Effective Testimony](#)), you're ready to testify in committee.

### ***What to Expect in Committee***

The date, time and location of a committee hearing is made public via the committee notice. You'll want to arrive to the committee room 5-10 minutes before the hearing begins to secure a seat in the audience (see our guide with important [Statehouse information](#)). While the committee chairs try to keep their meetings prompt, committees can be delayed. Committee hearings can also be lengthy, so be patient and prepare for a potentially long day, as schedules may change.

The chair of the committee will go bill by bill through the agenda (usually in order, but not always) and will call your name when it's your turn to testify. When your name is called, approach the podium and present your testimony. You can simply read from your written remarks or speak in summary. We encourage you to summarize your points rather than reading, particularly if previous witnesses have presented similar testimony. After you are finished presenting, the committee members will have the opportunity to ask questions. When there are no further questions, the committee chair will thank you for your participation and your job is done. You may stay for the rest of the meeting or leave after your presentation.

### ***Committee Etiquette***

Testifying is a formal process, although the committee allows leeway for the public in committee procedures, as the process is unfamiliar to most people. Here are some key things to remember:

- **Address responses to questions through the chair:** As the person running the hearing, all responses to questions from committee members should go through the chair. This can be as simple as saying "Through the chair..." or "Chairman, Representative/Senator..." before giving your answer.
- **If you don't know the answer, don't give one:** It's perfectly acceptable to say that you don't know the answer to a question and/or that you'll follow up at another time.
- **Be respectful and don't say anything you wouldn't want widely broadcast:** No matter their position, always be respectful to committee members. And remember, committees are recorded – so don't say anything you wouldn't want on the internet for eternity!
- **Be brief:** While you do want to answer questions and present information thoroughly, members have a lot on their schedules and likely other items on the committee agenda that day. If your testimony or responses are too technical or drift, you risk losing the committee's attention. Be succinct.

The committee process is critical to a bill's success or failure, and the committee needs input from experts to better inform their decisions. Your role in the committee hearing is an essential piece of the legislative puzzle – bravo for engaging in this process!

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