

How To Testify Before a Legislative Committee

Committees are the heart of Oregon's legislative process. The committee process provides legislators more opportunity to closely study a measure than would be possible in a floor debate. Committees may hear from many people who support or oppose the measure.

Giving public testimony before a legislative committee can be an exciting and fulfilling experience if you are prepared.

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

Listed below are suggestions to help make your presentation successful.

- **Know Your Audience**

The members of the committee are "citizen legislators." They care that you have taken time out of your day to come and testify before them.

- Be respectful.
- 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.

- **Know the Issue**

Support your personal opinions with as many facts as possible. Be knowledgeable of the "other side of the story." You may be asked to discuss the differences. Draw from your own knowledge and experience.

- **Be Familiar with the Committee Process**

- Know the location of the building, the meeting room, and the meeting time.
- Agendas will be posted outside the meeting room. Check to make sure the measure you are interested in has not been removed from the agenda. The measures may not be heard in the printed order.
- If possible, attend a committee meeting before you testify to become familiar with the process and room layout.
- When you arrive at the meeting, sign the witness registration sheet. Witnesses are not necessarily called in chronological order.

- **Presenting Your Written Testimony**

1. When you are called to testify, give copies of your testimony to committee staff before you begin your presentation. The number of copies requested is printed on the bottom of the committee meeting agenda.
2. Begin your presentation by addressing the chairperson first, then members of the committee. "**Chair ____, members of the committee . . .**"
3. For the record, state your name, address, and the organization or group you represent.
4. State whether you support or oppose the legislative measure being heard and briefly explain. Do not read your testimony to the committee word for word. Prepare an outline.

5. Keep in mind you may have a ten minute version of your testimony--be prepared to summarize it in one minute--that may be all the time you are allowed!
6. Thank the committee members and offer to answer any questions. **"Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions."**
7. When a member asks you a question respond: **"Chair _____ , Senator/Representative (state name), the answer to your question is . . ."**
8. Relax! The members understand that this can be an intimidating experience--they don't expect a perfect presentation.

- **Group Testimony**

- Select several people to cover different topics so the testimony is not repetitive.
- Address the problem, possible solutions, and your group's best solution.

Special Needs

If you require special accommodation in order to testify before a committee, please contact the committee administrator or support staff 24 hours BEFORE the meeting with your request.

Contact Numbers: (503) 986-1813 or (503) 986-1187

TDD (503) 986-1467 (inside Salem)

1-800-332-2313 (outside Salem)