

# Testifying before a Legislative Committee

Legislative committees are made up of policymakers from both major political parties who deal with a specific set of issues (e.g., energy, education, health). Committees listen to testimony on proposed measures and then take action on issues, ranging from voting on whether to allow a bill to be considered by the full chamber, decision oversight measures for governmental bodies, to weighing policy proposals to shape a future bill or rule. Bills need to pass at least one committee vote in both the House and Senate before they can proceed.

Testifying before a committee represents an important opportunity for subject experts to educate legislators on often complex issues. And because your testimony may influence the committee's decisions, becoming a part of the permanent record that can be referenced in the future by other legislators or experts researching policy solutions, many people who have testified find it a fulfilling experience.

Here are some tips to help make your testimony successful.

**Know your audience.** Each committee is made up of state senators, representatives, or a mix of both. They appreciate the fact that you took time out of your day to come before them. You

should consider each committee member's position on the issue and tailor your testimony accordingly.

**Familiarize yourself with the process.** The location of the building, meeting room, meeting time, and instructions for offering testimony (whether written or verbal) may be found online. If you have questions, contact the committee's office for further instructions. If you have been invited by a legislator to be an expert witness, make sure their office gives you the time allotment and instructions.

Agendas will be posted outside the meeting room on the day of the hearing; make sure the measure you are interested in has not been removed, then sign the witness registration sheet.

**Prepare in advance.** As you write what you want to say, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Begin by addressing the chairperson first, then members of the committee
- State your name, address, and the organization or group you affiliate with
- State whether you support or oppose the measure being considered and briefly explain why
- Thank the members and offer to answer any questions
- Relax—the members understand this can be an intimidating experience and they don't expect a perfect presentation

**Be brief and direct.** Time is limited, so be concise. In a public hearing you often have only one to three minutes; as an expert witness invited to a formal committee or commission hearing, you often have no more than 10 minutes. Don't read your testimony word for word—use an outline. And bring copies of your written testimony, which will be distributed to committee members before you begin.

If you have questions while preparing to testify, or to learn more about the Union of Concerned Scientists Science Network, email [ScienceNetwork@ucsusa.org](mailto:ScienceNetwork@ucsusa.org).



Testifying represents an important opportunity for subject experts to educate committee members on often complex issues.