



DOs and DON'Ts for Legislative Testimony

Preparation and Presentation

1. Prepare, prepare, prepare! Decide what you want to accomplish and design a simple presentation to accomplish it.
2. Learn, if possible, the background of individual committee members before whom you are testifying. Review their biographical sketches and ask legislative coordinators for information about their major concerns with the legislative contact data base for history.
3. Assume little or no knowledge about the issue on the part of the legislators. Avoid jargon. It will not be understood by most legislators, the press or the audience. Anticipate testimony which may be in opposition to yours and prepare ways to respond to it, if needed. Be respectful of other points of view, but explain rationale for position.
4. Do not read your testimony, especially if you are going to hand out copies of your prepared remarks. Paraphrase, hitting the highlights. Be sure to state the most important information first. To the greatest extent possible, localize and humanize the issues. Tell legislators how their constituents are or would be affected. Use examples. These should be simple and commonplace (e.g., "Just as the cost of a loaf of bread isn't what it used to be, neither is the cost of...").
5. Comply if the chair requests short statements. Don't repeat testimony already given, particularly testimony given by another agency. Note any agreement. Instead of noting

disagreement simply explain the agency position.

6. Finish your testimony when you sense the committee members' minds are made up or when you feel they are only interested in a brief statement of support or opposition. Always end with a restatement of your major point and a clear statement of what you want—a vote for or against the bill.

Questions and Answers

1. Prepare answers to anticipated questions in advance. Give brief answers. Come to clear endings when you make a brief answer to a question. Do not feel compelled to say more because there is a pause after your answer.
2. Respectfully challenge bad information in a question. "In your question you referenced 3 of 4 business fail. The information I have from X source indicates 2 of 4 fail. I will be happy to meet with you and share the source report."
3. When asked a multi-part question, choose the part you want to answer or answer all questions in sequence. Ask the questioner to repeat the parts if necessary.
4. Anticipate difficult questions and prepare short appropriate responses.
5. Don't answer a question if you're not sure of the answer. Tell the members you will get a written response back to the committee and then do so.
6. When asked a negative question, use your answer as a bridge to making a positive statement.

Style

1. Be yourself.
2. Never lose your temper; always sound friendly and cooperative.
3. If there are television cameras present, do not play to the cameras.

4. Listen carefully to any questions. If it is a general question, respond with specifics, if it is a specific question respond generally. If giving an example use human examples rather than statistics.
5. Remember that a legislator never asks a stupid question. Your answer should always show that you respect the questioner.
6. Do not read testimony, give written materials to the staff to distribute and then use talking points to highlight what has been distributed.

OUTLINE FOR LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

Good afternoon Senator

Good morning Representative

Good evening members of the committee.

1. Introduction

- A. Who are you
I am _____.
- B. Who you represent
- C. If speaking to a bill, do you support it or oppose it

2. Statement of the Issue

- A. Present the issue
 1. Does something need to be changed?
 2. Who will be affected, and how will they be affected?
 3. What will be the cost of the change and the cost of the status quo?

3. Present Solution

- A. What do you want?

4. Conclusion

- A. Restate the Issue
- B. Restate your preferred solution
- C. Ask for their support (or vote)