



## Testifying At a Committee Hearing

Members of the general public are encouraged to testify before committees, though testimony must be arranged with committee staff prior to a scheduled hearing. Committees primarily focus hearings on particular bills, though occasionally they discuss issues of broad interest within the committee's jurisdiction. It's best not to appear to testify at a committee on the day it is scheduled to hear a particular bill or discuss a particular topic without previously contacting the committee staff or your representative. Call House Public Information Services at (651) 296-2146 or Senate Information (651) 296-0504 to find the phone numbers for committee staff or to receive a standing committee schedule.

### **Here are 10 simple suggestions to make it easier to get involved:**

1. **ARRIVE EARLY.** Getting to the meeting early will give you a chance to survey the terrain, identify legislators, and to make last-minute changes to your presentation.
2. **CONTACT THE COMMITTEE'S ADMINISTRATOR OR LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT.** If you want to testify, make sure you are on the committee meeting agenda. It's best to contact the committee a day or two before the hearing to do this. But, time permitting, it's possible to sign up and testify on same day of the hearing.
3. **INTRODUCE YOURSELF.** When speaking to the committee, clearly identify yourself and the organization you represent, if any. Then clearly state your position on the bill before the committee.
4. **SPEAK THROUGH THE COMMITTEE CHAIR.** All questions and answers during committee hearings are routed through the committee chair. Address the chair as "Madame Chair" or "Mr. Chair." This makes it easier to follow the testimony when listening to tapes of recorded committee meetings.
5. **DON'T BE INTIMIDATED.** This is a citizen Legislature. Representatives are your friends and neighbors and they want to hear what you have to say. Just state your case clearly and in simple terms as you would to anyone.
6. **BE BRIEF.** Make your key points as concisely as possible. Provide specific information about why your position is in the state's best interest. Legislators may want to know what, if anything, has been done in other states, what the costs might be, and what groups support or oppose your proposal. If you know the answers, include them in your statement.

7. **BE PREPARED TO ANSWER QUESTIONS.** The best way to make your case is to provide straightforward answers to legislators' questions. If you don't know the answer, say so. If possible, find the answer and pass it on to committee members.

8. **WRITTEN SUMMARIES.** You may want to have copies of a concise summary of your key points to hand out to legislators, staff and the news media. Some legislators say a clearly written letter, or issue sheet, is the most effective way of gaining support.

9. **OFFER TO HELP.** Citizens play a key role in shaping state policy. Ask if there is anything you can do to help get the proposal in question approved or defeated.

10. **MUTUAL RESPECT.** Your views are important and you have a right to be treated courteously by all members and staff. Likewise, legislators are more apt to respond to polite treatment than to browbeating. There are many sides to every issue and each one has merit. Understand the difficult position legislators have in reaching their decisions.

If you need accommodations such as sign language interpreters or large print materials, call (651) 296-4860 as far in advance as possible.

Source: [www.leg.state.mn.us](http://www.leg.state.mn.us)