



## Tips for Presenting Effective Testimony

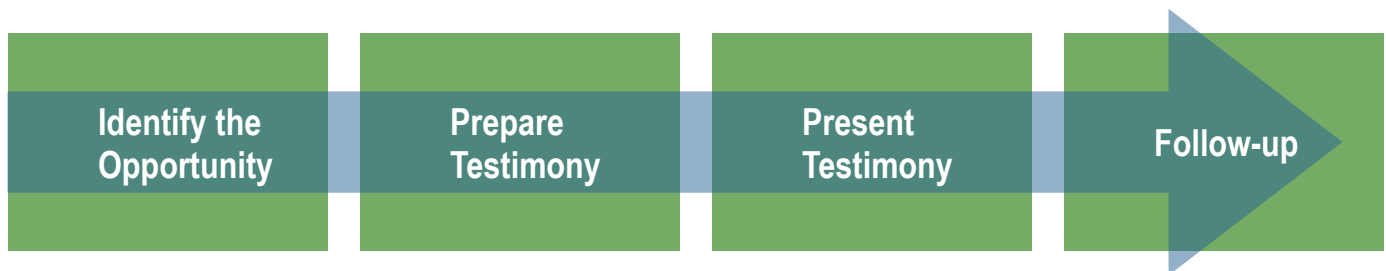
Presenting testimony is a powerful tool you can use to inform and influence policymakers before legislation is passed. It is an opportunity to:

- introduce yourself and your organization to committee members who have influence over your issue,
- share your organization's mission and message,
- inform committee members about your legislative and policy priorities, and
- influence legislation.

### Identify an Opportunity to Testify

Once you have determined your or your organization's opinion or position on an issue, policy, or piece of legislation then it is time to pay attention to opportunities to engaging policymakers through testimony.

Most legislative committees offer opportunities for individuals and organizations to share public testimony related to proposed legislation and it is a powerful opportunity to share your message. These tips will help to ensure that your recommendations and messages are heard and considered by policymakers.



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## Preparing for Testimony

1. **Time limits**—Determine if there are time limits for your testimony and write testimony so that you can stick to the time allotted.
2. **Finalize your position**—Make sure that your position is clear, concise, and that your organization’s leadership supports your recommendations. Confirming the support of your organization’s leadership is crucial in order to effectively speak on behalf of the organization and ensures that messages are aligned.
3. **Multiple prioritized versions**—Have a short and long version for your testimony to ensure you can get your points across no matter how much time you are given on the day of testimony. Make sure that your most important points are included the beginning of your testimony so that it is the first thing policymakers hear and read.
4. **Prepare legislators with questions**—Use your relationships with members of the committee to suggest questions they might ask you during your testimony that will support or enhance your messages.
5. **Confirm logistics**—Find out where the committee will be held, what time the committee is scheduled to begin, and confirm it the day before and the day of, just in case something changes.
6. **Identify committee forms**—Determine if you will need to submit a form including your name and the issue you are presenting testimony on by contacting the committee chair or clerk’s office ahead of time.
7. **Understand requirements**—Some committees require you to submit testimony in writing in advance of the committee hearing for electronic distribution. Other committees require that you bring copies of your testimony for all members of the committee. Determine what the committee requires and plan to bring copies that you can hand out to people in the audience, to members of the media, and with committee members in the event their technology is not working.
8. **Understand the process for committee questions**—Determine the process for responding to questions from committee members. Questions and responses generally flow through the chair of the committee; be prepared to answer questions by first stating, “Chair \_\_\_\_\_, Senator/Representative \_\_\_\_\_” and then respond to the question. Don’t be afraid to say you do not know the answer and offer to follow up with the representative and provide the requested information.
9. **Leverage Committee staff**—Many times the staff of committee members know as much as legislators about process, procedure, and how to approach your testimony. Most staff members are very approachable. Get to know the staff of the committee chairperson and leverage their knowledge and ask them questions to help be better prepared.



## Presenting your Testimony

10. **Acknowledgement**—When you begin speaking, be sure to acknowledge the leadership of the committee. For example, Chair Smith, Vice Chair Anderson, and Ranking Member Jones.
11. **Introduction**—Identify yourself and the organization you are representing and the bill/policy/issue you are there to discuss.
12. **Thank the committee**—Thank the committee for the opportunity to provide your testimony related to the bill/policy/issue you are there to discuss.
13. **Highlight recommendations**—Share your recommendations and position in a brief, succinct, and clear manner. If you have a specific ask or request share it clearly and present supporting rationale.
14. **Include stories and data**—In addition to verifiable data, consider including a relevant personal story, experience, or compelling anecdote within your testimony.
15. **Thank the committee**—Thank the committee again for the opportunity, even if you feel like it did not go well.
16. **Answer questions**—Offer to answer questions from the committee. If you do not know an answer, be honest, say that you do not have the information on hand but you would be happy to follow up with the committee.
17. **Be prepared for the unexpected**—
  - Your time may be limited at the last minute; be prepared to summarize your position and recommendations in as little as 1–2 minutes.
  - The order of the committee agenda is often subject to change; be prepared to present your testimony earlier or later than you anticipated.
  - You may experience an unfriendly committee member that tries to initiate a debate or argument; be respectful and never attack. Stay calm and polite and professional so that your message can be heard and you are not dismissed.

## Following up on your Testimony

18. **Reach out to the committee**—Contact the committee through the committee chair, the chair's staff person or clerk's office to share information regarding any questions they asked that you were unable to answer at the time.
19. **Connect with media**—Consider emailing or hand delivering your testimony to members of the media and offer to speak with them if they have any questions.
20. **Schedule meetings**—Attempt to schedule follow up meetings with policymakers to further discuss your position and recommendations.



Presenting testimony is a great opportunity to increase policymaker knowledge and impact legislation to further your issue or cause. The key to presenting testimony effectively is to have a clear position and recommendations, be prepared, stay focused, calm, and flexible, and follow up strategically.

For more tips on engaging with policymakers see ACS' "[Five Rules for Policymaker Engagement](#)" and "[Key Tips for Policymaker Meetings](#)". Check out all of ACS's tools and resources here: <http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/tools-resources/>

