



How To Give Effective Public Testimony

- When giving your testimony, first address the leader or chairperson of the committee you are presenting to, as well as the members of the committee. Example: Good morning, Chair Wellman, and members of the Early Learning & K-12 Education Committee.
- Know the subject matter well, and most importantly, the factual points. The most important thing that one can provide through testimony is a better understanding of the crucial, factual issues, and how those factual issues may (or clearly will) impact persons and programs. Conversely, the quickest way to lose credibility is to not thoroughly know the facts. If you lose credibility, it is very difficult to regain it, and it can carry over to other issues.
- “Less is more.” This is especially true on controversial matters. Stated differently, pick only a couple of critical issues or points, and focus on them, rather than trying to address everything. You will be most effective in presenting testimony if you can provide one or two important points, or if you have a relevant personal story to share with the committee.
- Make your points, and then stop. Sometimes people make critical points, and then “lose” the audience, by continuing and getting sidetracked or bogged down with other issues or areas.
- If you write out your testimony, don’t make the mistake of essentially just reading it to the committee. Use your verbal testimony as an opportunity to personally connect with your lawmakers by telling your relevant personal story or by making just one or two critical points.
- While you are testifying, shift your gaze to different members of the committee. Try to make eye contact with each committee member at some point during the testimony. As you know, one way to obtain credibility is to establish eye contact. Note: If you are responding to a question from a committee member, you will need to maintain eye contact with that person a bit more, but you still want to involve other members of the committee by eye contact. It is important to bring your eye contact back to the person who asked the question as you conclude your response.
- Time your presentation. Many times, legislative committees only give a person 1 to 3 minutes to present testimony. You may need to leave out some of your presentation, so be prepared for that.
- Slow down a little when you speak because the adrenaline rush of the moment may cause you to speak too quickly.
- If testifying in person, make sure you are speaking into the microphone, but don’t stare at the microphone.
- If testifying virtually, try to look directly into your camera when speaking.
- Don’t view questions as impediments, even if the question is obviously hostile. Rather, see questions as opportunities to educate, and to bring the discussion back to your one or two key points.
- At the conclusion of your testimony, thank your audience for their time.
- Note: You may also submit your written testimony, either by emailing the committee members directly, or through the leg.wa.gov system.