

Do's and Don'ts for Providing Public Testimony

Whenever a bill is considered by the Legislature or Congress, like the state budget and federal appropriations bills, time is allotted for public comment. In such cases, a constituent story can be used to illustrate the major points that members need to hear in order to make a decision. Public testimony is particularly important because it provides a chance to speak to, educate, and potentially influence an entire committee or large number of members who attend the hearing.

Do:

- Show up early and meet with other people who are testifying on the same side of the issue as you are.
- Work with the legislative office to discuss strategy and to help make sure you are on the agenda.
- Dress as conservatively as possible. Your arguments must make the strongest statement, not your clothes.
- Plan what you are going to say, emphasizing a specific point or two.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Keep your remarks brief - one to two minutes, unless you are told otherwise.
- Try and meet or correspond with the legislators on the committee before the hearing, so that they are familiar with your issue and arguments, and so that you know the information that will convince them to vote your way.
- Focus on those who are supportive or undecided.
- After the hearing, thank the legislators who voted your way.
- As much as possible, speak directly to the legislators and make eye contact.

Don't:

- Repeat arguments that have already been made.
- Make disparaging remarks about legislators who disagree with you.
- Speak past the allotted time.
- Feel you have to speak for the full allotted time.
- Read your comments in a monotone voice without looking up.
- Consistently try to convince those who disagree with you.
- Make negative remarks about people who are testifying against you.
- Leave before the Committee votes on the bill or funding item.