



## ***Testifying at Legislative Hearings***

Legislators hold public hearings to get public input on the budget or on pending legislation. A public hearing is the opportunity for citizens – whether as individuals or on behalf of organizations – to state their opinions on proposals for new laws and for the budget. So, if you’ve got strong feelings about a proposal before the County Board or the State Legislature, go to the public hearing and testify!

### **Here’s how to be effective:**

- ⌚ **Be concise:** **Keep** your remarks within the time limits. Try to summarize your prepared statement rather than reading all of it. Focus on making your essential points clear. You can submit written copies of the full text.
- ⌚ **Check out the logistics.** Talk with staff or experienced advocates in advance to learn about the specifics for the hearing. Ask out about time limits for speakers, and what else is on the agenda. Some hearings may last for hours so be prepared!
- 📋 **Be prepared:** Know your subject thoroughly so that you can answer questions from the legislators who are members of the committee and from the committee’s staff. If you don’t know an answer, say so and offer to submit an answer after the hearing.
- 😊 **Be polite:** Even in the face of questions, which are hostile, your responses should be courteous. This is one of the hallmarks of the legislative culture. Take care to keep your cool and maintain your credibility.
- 📋 **Be specific:** There’s a limit to the amount of information, which a legislator is likely to remember. Therefore, try to use concrete examples, stories, or a supporting graphic which are memorable, trigger sympathetic reactions, and have great impact.
- ❓ **Avoid jargon:** Legislators are generalists. They vote on hundreds of bills – some more complicated than this one. You may understand all intricacies and the technical terms in the bill, but legislators may not. Don’t make it hard for them to understand your points.
- 👊 **Don’t be intimidated:** It’s easy for a person holding high elective office to fluster a witness. If you’re well prepared and confident of your subject this won’t happen to you.
- ☑ **Message discipline:** Stick to your message, don’t get diverted. When you’re preparing, identify the key points you’ll want to make and the effective counter-arguments to the points the other side will probably make. At the risk of sounding repetitive – be repetitive!
- 📋 **Extra homework:** Find out which members will be at the hearing and then read about their personal and political backgrounds. Know what state or district they represent, where they went to school, what professional training they had, etc. You may be able to incorporate this knowledge in your answers to their questions, thus helping to bring a point home to them.
- 📋 **Copies of your statement:** Bring copies for committee members, committee staff, and some extras. Give copies to the reporters who are covering the hearing. Also, give copies to the Committee staff for distribution to all the members of the Committee, whether they attended the hearing or were absent. If you can’t attend a hearing, you may be able to submit your testimony by email to committee staff.