

Senate Remote Testimony Policy

Approved by F&O 1-29-2019

BRIEF SUMMARY

1. Makes the remote testimony program for the Senate permanent.
2. Clarifies administrative parameters necessary to support remote testimony operations given existing technology and staffing levels, such as processes relating to timeframes for requests, remote site availability, and public sign-in processes.
3. Directs implementation of a 2019 remote testimony expansion program to immediately increase opportunities for the public to testify on legislation from remote sites.
4. Establishes a process to identify programmatic improvements and resources necessary to continue to expand remote open public testimony opportunities in the future.

DRAFT F&O POLICY LANGUAGE

1. Creates a permanent remote testimony program for the Senate. The Washington State Senate utilizes remote testimony on a permanent basis, during both the legislative session and interim, to expand opportunities for people across the state to actively participate in the legislative process from locations outside of Olympia.

2. Clarifies administrative processes to support remote testimony operations.

Senate committees are encouraged to use remote testimony in support of public access to the Legislature, including for open public testimony on bills and invited participants during work sessions, consistent with a committee's schedule and the administrative provisions below:

- Chairs must accommodate requests from Senators and the public to the maximum extent possible, consistent with the committee's schedule and these administrative provisions.

- Committee staff must receive confirmation of Chair approval of a request at least two business days prior to the meeting at which remote testimony is to be used for an invited speaker, and at least four business days prior if remote testimony is to be used for open public testimony. Any request must include information necessary for SCS and LegTech to establish the requested connection including the requestor's contact information, the requested remote site or individual connection information, and hearing information including the date, time, and relevant bill or work session topic.
- If remote testimony is to include open public testimony, anyone from the public wishing to testify remotely must sign in at least 24 hours prior to the meeting at which the requested open public testimony is to occur. The Senate will maintain an online form for approved remote open public testimony opportunities.
- The use of remote testimony is subject to room and videoconferencing availability at both the remote site and Senate hearing rooms. Requests that exceed available capacity will be handled on a first requested, first served basis.
- Only nonpartisan sites or individual connections may be used.

3. Creates a 2019 remote testimony expansion program to immediately increase public testimony opportunities. During the 2019 session, the Senate will undertake an intensive effort to increase opportunities for the public to testify on legislation from remote sites throughout the state. The expansion program will also help inform efforts to further expand remote testimony opportunities in the future.

The Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee will facilitate the 2019 remote testimony expansion program. For hearings of this committee during the 2019 session, members of the public may request remote testimony for any bill scheduled for public hearing via links on appropriate committee and remote testimony program websites. Remote testimony will be offered at the first two remote testimony sites requested for each hearing, subject to generally applicable remote testimony request timelines and remote site room availability requirements (as listed in part 2 above). Individual connections may not be used for public testimony, although such connections can be used for a work session.

4. Establishes a process to identify programmatic improvements and resources necessary to continue to expand remote open public testimony opportunities in the future. SCS and LegTech will collect information on public use of the 2019 remote testimony expansion program, the successes and challenges encountered in administering the program, and provide regular updates to the Secretary of the Senate and F&O Committee.

SCS will collaborate closely with LegTech to evaluate outcomes from the remote testimony expansion program following the conclusion of the 2019 session. Based on this policy and any additional objectives identified by the F&O Committee, SCS and LegTech will analyze options for programmatic improvements and IT and staffing resources that would allow the Senate to provide more comprehensive, public access driven remote testimony opportunities in the future. After review and approval by the Secretary of the Senate, this analysis will be provided to the F&O Committee.