

HOW TO TESTIFY IN COMMITTEE



“Open” Legislature

Washington State has one of the most “open” legislatures in the country. A bill has a public hearing before Senate and House committees before being considered on the floor of the House and Senate. Your opportunity to testify comes at the committee hearings. If you cannot appear before a committee, contact your legislator making your position on a bill known. You can do so by writing a letter, sending an e-mail, calling the legislator’s Olympia office, or by calling the Legislative Hotline at 800-562-6000.

Senate committees usually meet in hearing rooms in the John A. Cherberg Building and House Committees usually meet in the John L. O’Brien Building. Both buildings are adjacent to the Legislative Building in Olympia.

“Every person may freely speak, write and publish on all subjects, being responsible for the abuse of that right.”

— Article 1, Section 1
Washington State Constitution

Committee Hearings

Legislative hearings are conducted informally. They are not judicial proceedings and the rules are somewhat relaxed. Anyone can testify; you do not need formal training. Schedules of committee hearings are published weekly and daily during the legislative session.

To find out when a hearing is scheduled:

- Check our web site at www.leg.wa.gov.
- Call the toll-free Legislative Hotline number (1-800-562-6000).
- Inquire in person or by phone at the Legislative Information Center, 110 Legislative Building (360-786-7573).
- Subscribe to the Legislature’s Committee E-mail Notification Service ([GovDelivery](#)).

The Legislative Information Center also has copies of bills for distribution. Be sure to ask for any pending amendments or substitutes to particular bills. Notices of interim committee hearings are sent out by committees between legislative sessions and are available via the Legislature’s Committee E-mail Notification Service ([GovDelivery](#)).

If you are a person with a disability and need a special accommodation, please contact the House at (360) 786-7271, or the Senate at (360) 786-7189. TTY 1-800-833-6388. For further legislative information, call the Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000, or check the internet at www.leg.wa.gov.



Before the Hearing

Prepare Your Remarks. Time is usually limited, so be brief and direct. Written testimony should not be read at committee hearings. Writing down your comments in outline form will be helpful when you speak, and you should summarize your written testimony.

Avoid Duplication. If other persons will be offering similar testimony at the hearing, try to coordinate your testimony and avoid duplication. Well-organized testimony is the most effective.

Are you a Lobbyist?

Generally, if you are testifying on a bill or issue and represent only yourself, you will not be required to register as a lobbyist.

This [Public Disclosure Commission \(PDC\)](#) page outlines guidelines on this subject. *You do not have to register and report if you:*

1. Appear only before public meetings of legislative committees or state agencies, or
2. Do not receive pay, expenses or other consideration for lobbying and make no expenditure for or on behalf of a legislator, elected official or state employee in connection with lobbying, or
3. Restrict your lobbying to four days during any three month period and spend no more than \$35 for or on behalf of a legislator, elected official or state employee.

“All political power is inherent in the people, and governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and are established to protect and maintain individual rights.”

— **Article 1, Section 1**
Washington State Constitution

At The Meeting

- Be punctual; usually there is only one public hearing at which testimony is held on a particular bill.
- Sign-in is now done electronically, and **closes one hour before the meeting** regardless of how or where you sign in from. You may access the [Committee Sign-In Program](#) from a web-enabled device (smartphone, laptop or tablet).
- Click Committee Electronic Sign-In Instructions to obtain more detailed instructions or for information on how to create an optional [Committee Sign-In](#) account.
- The most recent proposed amendments or substitute bills are available from [Committee Documents](#).
- Written materials are no longer accepted. You can submit written testimony [here](#).
- Testifiers aren't allowed to use presentation equipment. Any presentation material needs to be submitted as written testimony [online](#).

How the Meeting Is Conducted

Be present at the beginning of the hearing. The committee chair will open the hearing on a particular bill. Frequently, opening comments will be made by the bill's sponsor or by committee staff. Sometimes, however, the chair will ask for testimony from proponents and opponents immediately.

The chair will organize the hearing to ensure that:

1. The committee members hear relevant information,
2. Interested persons are given the opportunity to express their positions, and
3. The hearing does not exceed the time available.

Most committee hearings are limited to no more than two hours, and may have several matters pending. The chair will attempt to be fair and provide each person an opportunity to testify. It may be necessary, however, to restrict testimony so that everyone is given an opportunity to express his or her opinions. You may be called with others to save time.

Making Your Remarks

1. Begin by introducing yourself to the chair and committee members and stating your purpose. For example, “Mr. or Madam Chair and members of the committee, I am John Doe from Spokane. I am here representing myself. I support this bill because...”
2. In your opening remarks, make it clear whether you are representing other citizens, or a separate group.
3. Be brief, and be sure your remarks are clear. Avoid being too technical, and do not repeat previously made remarks. You do not need to be nervous or worried about how you present your testimony.
4. Be prepared for questions and comments from committee members. These are designed to gain additional information, but don't answer if you are not sure of the answer. Tell the members you will send a written answer back to the committee and then follow through.
5. Restrict yourself to your testimony. Abstain from other overt demonstrations such as clapping, cheering, booing, etc.

How to Submit Written Testimony

1. Select the committee name and meeting date and time, then select the bill for which you would like to submit written testimony.
2. Select “I would like to Submit Written Testimony.” Written testimony will close 24 hours after the start time of the hearing.
3. Provide your written comments in the form. Your comments will be made available to legislative members and staff of the committee, and will be included in the legislative record for bill and meeting archival purposes, but will not be used as part of testimony summary materials on the bill report.

How to State Your Position on a Bill Without Testifying

1. Select the committee and meeting date and time, then select the bill for which you would like to register.
2. Select “I would like my position noted for the legislative record.” **Registration will close 1 hour before the start time of the hearing.**
3. Ensure your registration information is accurate. Your registered position will be made available to legislative members and staff of the committee, and will be included in the legislative record for bill and meeting archival purposes, but will not be used as part of testimony summary materials on the bill report.