

# How to Testify in Committee



*Every citizen has the right to testify, orally or in writing, on bills or constitutional amendments being heard by the Washington State Legislature.*

*"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

*"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

## **"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.

## **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](http://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).

## **Before the Hearing**

Are you a Lobbyist? Generally, if you are testifying on a bill or issue and represent only yourself, you



*If you are a person with a disability and need special accommodations, please contact the House at (360) 786-7271, and the Senate at (360) 786-7189. TTY 1-800-833-6388.*

will not be required to register as a lobbyist.

A Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) brochure 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.

A copy of this brochure is available through the Legislative Information Center, or you may check with the PDC if you're uncertain. The PDC provides on-line information for lobbyists as well.

**Prepare Your Remarks.** Time is usually limited, so be brief and direct. Written testimony should not be read at committee hearings. Committee staff will distribute copies of written testimony to members of the committee if you bring a sufficient number – one for each member.

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.

## 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 in most committees. You may:
  - (1) Go to one of the Committee Sign-In kiosks located in the main hallway of the Cherberg Building and the O'Brien Building, each Senate and House hearing room, or the first floor of the Legislative Building and the Pritchard Building; or
  - (2) Access the [Committee Sign-In Program](#) from a web-enabled device (smartphone, laptop or tablet), only while on campus and connected to the Legislature's WSLPublic wireless Internet network; or
  - (3) Since not all committees use the Committee Sign-In Program, if you do not see the committee listed within the sign-in program, go to the hearing room to sign-in on the paper sheets.
- Click [Committee Electronic Sign-In Instructions](#) to obtain more detailed instructions or for information on how to create an optional Committee Sign-In account.
- Check to see if copies of proposed amendments or substitute bills are available.
- Take your written materials to the committee staff for distribution.
- Talk to the committee staff if you are going to use the presentation equipment.

## 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

If you are unable to attend a committee meeting, you may use the following method for submitting written testimony:

**In the House.** Email your written testimony directly to all committee members as well as to the Committee Chair or the Chair's LA. Be sure to include the bill number and your position on the bill. A list of Committee Chairs can be found at this website: <http://app.leg.wa.gov/Rosters/CommitteeMembersByCommittee/House>.

**In the Senate.** You may email your written testimony directly to committee members as well as to the Committee Chair or the Chair's LA. Be sure to include the bill number and your position on the bill. Another option is to email your written testimony to committee staff, as an alternative or in addition to submitting testimony to committee members. A