

## Testifying at a Public Hearing

Public testimony opportunities are extremely important for your issue. Sometimes they make the form of informal opinion-gathering at a public workshop, but more often you will be testifying at a more formal public hearing held by the decision-making body. Written testimony is usually accepted at public hearings, but it is far more powerful to attend the hearing and deliver spoken testimony.



## Why Public Hearings Are Important

1. Testimony becomes part of the official record and will likely be used later in making a final decision.
2. Public hearings can provide new factual information, which can convince the decision-makers to re-think an earlier decision.
3. The media often attend hearings on controversial issues, so the hearing is another way to get your message out to a broader audience.
4. Public testimony sends a strong political signal to the legislative body or agency, as well as to the press, about public opinion on the issue.
5. Hearings are important from a legal standpoint. If you suspect you may appeal the decision later, your legal standing is based on having made your legal arguments during the public comment period.

## Guidelines for Effective Public Testimony

Before the hearing, spend as much time as possible preparing for your testimony:

- Verify the time, date, and place of the hearing a day or so in advance.
- Find out where in the meeting agenda the public testimony portion will be and adjust your arrival time accordingly.
- Find out the time frame for testimony. Most hearings have a time limit, which is usually between two and five minutes.
- Get on the speaker's list. (Sometimes you can do this in advance, but more commonly you will sign in at the door of the hearing and speak in that order.)
- Prepare your testimony. Research the issues so you can support your opinions with facts. Emotions rarely sway decisions as strongly as facts do. Tailor your testimony to the time allotment. It is much better to finish before your time is up than to be cut off before you are finished with your points.

