

# Tips for Testifying at a Legislative Hearing

When a bill is first introduced in committee it will have a hearing where the public can provide testimony. The committee might have more than one hearing about the same bill. If committee members hear from people who support and oppose the bill, the committee chair may ask for the groups to work together to find a compromise and suggest changes.

## When are hearings held?

Hearings typically happen on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday after senators and representatives meet together in their chambers. The exact start time can change. Legislative committee meetings are posted in a daily Committee Calendar here: [http://status.rilegislature.gov/legislative\\_committee\\_calendar.aspx](http://status.rilegislature.gov/legislative_committee_calendar.aspx)

## Where at the State House should I go?

Hearings can be held in different rooms at the RI State House. Check the agenda for the committee holding the hearing for the exact room.. [http://status.rilegislature.gov/legislative\\_committee\\_calendar.aspx](http://status.rilegislature.gov/legislative_committee_calendar.aspx)

## Prepare Before the Hearing

- Read the bill and make sure you understand it. You can find any bill here: <https://www.rilegislature.gov/pages/legislation.aspx>
- Practice what you want to say ahead of time.
- **Do not speak for more than two minutes.**
- It is fine to read from notes
- Testimony is first come, first served. Arrive early and wait for your turn.
- You can learn more by watching a hearing before you go. You can watch the General Assembly on Capitol TV: <https://capitolvri.cablecast.tv/>
- More about parking and accessibility at the RI State House here: <https://www.sos.ri.gov/divisions/civics-and-education/ri-state-house/visitor-information>
- Bring snacks and water, because you might have to wait for a long time if many people want to speak.
- Sometimes the rooms are cold and sometimes they are hot, so wear layers.

## Tips for Good Testimony

Every hearing is an opportunity for you to share your story, experience, or opinion. Committees will sometimes hear more than one bill at a meeting, and some bills will involve many people testifying.

- Arrive early, and go to the room where the hearing will be held.
- Look for a paper sign-in sheet near the door and add your name. Testimony is first come, first served, so be ready to wait.
- Say your name, where you live, and if you are testifying in support or against the bill. If you support the bill, but have suggestions for ways to make it better, say that at the beginning, too.
- Focus on your own experience. If someone else makes the points you want to make, it's okay to introduce yourself and say that you agree with the testimony shared by someone else. Then share only the most important point you want to make.
- If you have suggestions for changing the language of the bill, write down the specific language and bring it with you.
- The legislators can ask you questions after you testify. If you don't know the answer to a question, it is okay to say that you don't know, but you would be happy to follow up with more information.
- If you cannot stay for the whole hearing, you can write on the hearing sheet that you are there in support or against, but not speaking.

### **Submitting Written Testimony**

- If you cannot attend the hearing at all, you can submit written testimony to the clerk for the committee. Look for their email address on the committee web site or the meeting agenda.