

Testifying Before Legislative Committees



MASBO Winter Conference
February 2010

Know Your Audience

- The members of the Legislature are "citizen legislators." They know that you have taken time out of your day to come and testify and want to hear what you have to say.
- Look up information on the Committee (www.leg.state.mn.us). Who are the members who serve on the committee? What areas of the state do they represent? Does your local legislator serve on the committee?
- Be respectful and understand that not all the committee members may agree with you.

Know the Issue

- Support your personal opinions with as many facts as possible. Relate the issue to what is happening in your community.
- Draw from your own knowledge and experience. Remember that you are the expert.
- Be prepared to answer questions. If the answer to a question is not known, acknowledge that, offer to find the answers and get back to the legislator or chair of the committee. Follow up with information as soon as possible.

Be Familiar with the Committee Process

- Know the location of the building, the meeting room, and the meeting time. Go to <http://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hinfo/leginfo/Cme2Cap.pdf> for detailed information.
- Agendas will be posted outside the meeting room. Check to make sure the bill you are interested in has not been removed from the agenda.
- Be present at the start of the hearing as agenda items may not be heard in the order printed.

Be Familiar with the Committee Process

- Copies of legislation and any related handouts are made available near the entrance of the committee room.
- If possible, attend a committee meeting before you testify to become familiar with the process and room layout.
- Do not be offended if legislators come and go during a meeting. They may have other meetings or may need to present their own bills in other committee hearings.

Presenting Your Testimony

- Begin your presentation by addressing the Chair first, then members of the committee. "Chair____, members of the committee . . ."
- State your name and the organization or group you represent for the record. The committee hearing will be recorded.
- State whether you support or oppose the legislative measure being heard and briefly explain.
- Do not read your testimony to the committee word for word. Prepare an outline.

Presenting Your Testimony

- Be brief, avoid being too technical and do not repeat previously made remarks.
- Keep in mind you may have a ten minute version of your testimony but be prepared to summarize it in one minute-- that may be all the time you are allowed.
- Try to refrain from using technical jargon and spell out acronyms (i.e. Average Daily Membership instead of ADM).

Presenting Your Testimony

- Expect some questions and comments from committee members. These questions are not designed to embarrass you, but merely to provide additional information.
- When a member asks you a question remember to go through the Committee Chair.
- Practice, practice, practice.
- Thank the committee members for their time and offer to answer any questions.

Presenting Your Testimony

- Relax! The members understand that this can be an intimidating experience -- they don't expect a perfect presentation.



Questions??