

# Legislative Toolbox



## How to Testify

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**T**here are many reasons to testify before the Minnesota Legislature. Sometimes it might be to generate support on one side of an issue, and other times it might be to lend expertise on an issue. No matter the reason for testifying before a committee, it is always helpful to know the basics of testifying beforehand. If you or someone from your organization has not testified before, here are a few key tips that can help make the process smoother.

### 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 they want to hear what you have to say. Before you testify, take the time to look up information on the Committee ([www.leg.state.mn.us](http://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?

Remember to be respectful — and understand that not all committee members may agree with you, but every issue has two sides and each side has merit.

### 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 when testifying and

remember that you are the expert. Citizens play a key role in shaping state policy and at times legislators are looking for your knowledge to guide them.

### Be Familiar with the Committee Process

The first thing you should do if you want to testify is to contact the committee’s administrator or legislative assistant. This will help ensure that you are on the committee meeting agenda and will be given time to speak. It’s best to contact the committee a day or two before the hearing to do this. However, time permitting, it’s possible to sign up and testify on same day of the hearing — but there are no guarantees.

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 and double check that you are in the correct committee.

If possible, try to arrive early so that you have 10 minutes of prep time before the committee begins. This will allow you to get your information in order as well as get a feeling for who else is there. It is possible that agenda items could be switched around to accommodate committee members’ schedules — so you may have an opportunity to make your presentation earlier than originally scheduled.

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Near the entrance of the committee room, copies of legislation and any related handouts are made available for the public. If you do bring handouts, bring enough for the committee and staff as well as some for the public (if you care to share information with them).

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.

If possible, attend a committee meeting before you testify to become familiar with the process and room layout. If you are not able to attend a meeting in person, you can watch committee meetings online. This will help familiarize you with the process before you show up.

## Presenting Your Testimony

Begin your presentation by addressing the Chair first, then members of the committee. “Chair \_\_\_\_, members of the committee...”

Next, state your name and the organization or group you represent, whether you support or oppose the legislative measure being heard, and briefly explain why.

Try not to read your testimony to the committee word for word. Prepare an outline in advance that you can work from to guide

you from point to point. 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. When presenting, be brief, avoid being too technical, and do not repeat previous remarks. Also try to refrain from using technical jargon and spell out acronyms (i.e. Adult Basic Education instead of ABE).

After you have presented your testimony, thank the committee members and chair for their time, and offer to answer any questions they might have. Always be prepared to answer some questions and comments from committee members. These questions are not designed to embarrass you, but merely to provide additional information.

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.

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

One last thing to remember is practice, practice, practice. The more you practice, the more relaxed you will feel and the easier it will be.

