



How To Testify: A Guide to Prepare District Residents to Give Official Testimony

This document is designed to support you in preparing to testify before public officials or other groups to advocate for a policy, rule change, or legislation or to share your perspective on a relevant issue. Using this document will aid you in putting together an effective written and oral testimony.

There are a number of opportunities and venues in which you can make sure that your voice is heard on the issues that you care about. Here are a few in the realm of educational and youth issues:

- [D.C. Council – Committee on Education](#)
- [D.C. Public Schools – School Budget Hearings](#)
- [D.C. Public Charter School Board – Public Hearings on School Openings, School Closures, and Policy Changes](#)
- [Advisory Neighborhood Commissions](#)

First, make sure you are aware of the rules and format of the committee/panel/officials you'll be testifying in front of. Most committees, or agencies, will require you to submit written testimony for the record as well as an oral testimony, in some instances in advance of the hearing. In addition, most of the time there will be a time limit (most likely between 3 and 5 minutes) for you to give your oral testimony. You can find this information out by going to the agency's website or contacting the public official's office who is chairing the committee.

Preparing to Testify:

- If you are testifying about a certain piece of legislation, do an online bill search ([DC Council](#)) or find the proposed rule/regulation ([here](#)); this will give you better context regarding the piece of legislation or rule change.
- If your goal is to advocate on behalf of or against implementing proposed policy/statutory changes; make sure that you research the issue thoroughly; then, develop 4-5 points that help to clarify your stance on the issue or policy. Clarifying these points will help to keep your testimony focused on the topic that you came to give testimony for.
- Think about the following questions as you start putting together your testimony:
 - Decide on the purpose of your testimony.
 - Are you advocating in support of a particular piece of legislation or against it? If so, why?
 - Do you want to bring a particular issue to the committee's, or agency's, attention?
 - Do you have suggestions on how to implement a policy that's in the process of being enacted?
 - During your research, did you find any examples of similar legislation, programs, policies, or rules that you are advocating for? If so, briefly share the examples that you found and clarify why you are proposing the policy or program.
 - What recommendations, if any, do you have for the committee, or agency, on implementing the changes you are advocating for?
 - Who (which government entity) would you propose be responsible for implementing the recommendations that you are proposing.
 - Allow lawmakers to hear your passion, voice, and unique viewpoint on how proposed legislation will affect you.

How to Testify:

- For your introduction, make sure to state your name, the capacity in which you are testifying (parent/student/PTA Chair/etc.), ward and neighborhood of residence, and the reason for your testimony.
- Next, begin to share your prepared testimony. Make sure to articulate your stance on the, provide recommendations for consideration, share the reasoning behind your position, and provide relevant points to support your position.



- Make sure to manage your time effectively. The amount of time that individuals are given to testify typically ranges between 3-5 minutes. There might not be enough time to share your entire written testimony orally but remember, you can submit longer written testimony for the record. Using an outline to manage your time and highlight relevant points to mention might also be helpful.
- As you give your testimony, remember public officials must make tough decisions on issues and testimony is your opportunity to let them know where you, their constituent, stands on the issues.

Tips for Testifying:

- Public Testimony is an important part of writing new laws.
 - Lawmakers want to hear from you on how a bill might impact your life. Your perspective might make or break a proposed piece of legislation.
- *Do not read word for word from your written testimony, if at all possible.*
- Keep your oral presentation short and to the point, but try to make it memorable. Remember, your personal story has a big impact.
- During your oral testimony, remember that you can direct the committee's, or agency's, attention to your written testimony for specific details.
- Remember that you may be subject to questions after your testimony.
- If you are able to succinctly state your message and why you are there in the first thirty to forty-five seconds, you may get more questions following your testimony. The more questions that you receive helps to create a very effective dialogue about the issue you are raising or the legislation you are testifying about.
- Pay attention to the conversation happening before you give your testimony. When it comes time to testify, adjust your remarks if necessary.
- It helps to rehearse your testimony at home before the big day. Rehearse in front of a mirror and then in front of your family and friends so that they can give you tips and pointer on how to effectively deliver your message.
- As you practice think about what the best sound-bites are from your testimony. Those points, or sound-bites, can have a big impact on your overall testimony. Practice speaking clearly and at an understandable pace.
- Don't forget— share your passion. Your testimony is valuable.