

## How to Testify at a Public Hearing

Testifying before the NH legislature is not something to be taken lightly. While it is not rocket science, you need to be well-prepared and should understand how the legislature functions, as well as proper state house etiquette, so as not to leave a negative impression that may be nearly impossible to overcome. It is recommended that you sit in on numerous committee hearings before you testify. If you're sure that you're ready, here are some specific hints to help you be as effective as possible.

### House of Representatives

For each bill scheduled for a public hearing, there is a **sign in sheet** on a table in the hearing room where you are asked to fill in your name, whether you favor or oppose the bill and if you are representing an organization (if not, write "self"). Just showing up and signing in carries weight with the committee as they often look at the sheet and sometimes announce the number of pros and cons.

If you are well-prepared to testify, you will need to fill out a **pink card** to do so. Generally, the representative who is closest to this table will pass the cards up to the chair. The rooms are usually laid out in a horseshoe fashion.

The chair will call on people to testify in the order they determine. Preference is usually given to the bill sponsor(s), other legislators, state employees and then John Q. Public. Be patient - your turn will come.

When your name is called, proceed to the chair provided, sit down, properly address the chair, introduce yourself and get right down to business.

If you have **written testimony**, submit it in the same way as your pink card.

If the chair asks you to summarize, please do so! Do not antagonize the chair (and the rest of the committee) by continuing to give your entire testimony at this time.

Most important rule of all: **Do not go over 3 minutes!** Practice at home, time yourself and cut it down. If you can't say it in 3 minutes, you can't say it!

Stick to 3 main points that are pertinent to the bill. If you have more points to be made, try to get a friend to make them for you. You may want to consider addressing an issue that opponents of the bill are likely to bring up.

If you go off topic or go on for too long, you may notice the reps getting that glazed over look. This is not a good thing and should be seriously avoided.

If others who have testified before you have already made your points, say so when you are called to speak. The reps will appreciate it if you don't repeat what they have just heard.

While you may not ask questions, you should be prepared to answer questions from the committee. Do your research first to have an idea of which committee members may be for or against the bill you are testifying on. This will give you advance information as to whether the various reps will be asking you a friendly or hostile question.

If you don't know the answer to a question, or don't understand the question, say so. Some questions are attempts to discredit you, others are attempts to help you get more information out to the committee. Take a moment to assess which it is and take a deep breath before you answer.

Remain polite and calm at all times, especially in the face of adversity.

### **Senate**

For each bill scheduled for a public hearing, there is a **sign in sheet** on a table in the hearing room where you are asked to fill in your name, whether you favor or oppose the bill and if you are representing an organization (if not, write "self"), and a box to check if you would like to speak (no pink cards!). Just showing up and signing in carries weight with the committee as they often look at the sheet and sometimes announce the number of pros and cons.

You may notice a large number of lobbyists in the Senate. One theory on this is that it's much easier to lobby 24 Senators than it is 400 Representatives.

Same rules apply here as in the House.