

Providing Testimony

Hearings are usually held in Gardner Auditorium, or Hearing Rooms A-1, A-2, B1 or B-2. It is difficult to anticipate the order in which bills will be heard, so plan to stay at a hearing for the duration which may sometimes be the entire day. If you wish to provide verbal testimony, you will need to sign in at the foyer outside of the hearing room, where there is usually a table and a clipboard. If applicable, you may wish to include the name of an organization with which you are affiliated with, or your home-town. We strongly urge you to call your own state representative and senator to ask that they both support the bill, and join you at the hearing (call The Arc at 781-891-6270 if you need help identifying your legislator). Legislators are used to these requests and if they are unable to attend, they may send a staff person on their behalf to greet you. After signing in, you will enter the hearing room and take a seat on one of the benches located at the rear of the room.

When to Speak and what to Say

You do not have to provide written testimony, but it is expected that if you choose to offer verbal testimony, you will provide some written statement to accompany your spoken words. We encourage you to provide enough copies for each member of the Committee (bring at least 15 if you are unsure of number of Committee members). You may provide written testimony without speaking. If you choose to speak, we encourage you NOT to simply read your written testimony. The Committee will want to hear, in your own words, why you are supporting the bill. Speak plainly and do not try to make more than a few points during your presentation, which should not exceed 3 minutes. Personal anecdotes and observations are the most effective components of good verbal testimony.

The Committee Chair will moderate the hearing and call names from the sign-in sheet. He/she may call people in groups, or individually, to sit before the Committee at a table. The Chair will indicate when it is time for you to speak. After you are finished speaking, members of the Committee are free to ask you questions – their job is to make a decision on the bill, so they may wish to understand more clearly, your own experience. Take your time if asked a question, and do not guess if you don't know the answer. Sometimes people feel nervous and speak before thinking. This is natural. If you feel nervous, take a breath and pause to gather your thoughts before answering a question – nobody will rush you to speak. When you are done, the Committee Chair will ask the next person to speak. You may then leave the room or move back to the rear to listen to others testify.

The Ten Informal Rules of Lobbying or Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lobbying But Never Thought to Ask

1. Consider yourself an information source. Legislators have limited time, staff, and interest on any one issue. They can't be as informed as they might like on all the issues – or the ones that concern you. You can fill the information gap.
2. Tell the truth. There is no faster way to lose your credibility than to give false or misleading information to a legislator.
3. Know who else is on your side. It is helpful for a legislator to know what other groups, individuals, state agencies and/or legislators are working with you on an issue.
4. Know the opposition. Anticipate who the opposition will be – organized or individual. Tell the legislator what their arguments are likely to be and provide them with answers and rebuttals to those arguments.
5. Make the legislator aware of any personal connection you may have. No matter how insignificant you may feel it is, if you have friends, relatives, and/or colleagues in common, LET THEM KNOW. Our legislative process is very informal and though it may make no difference in your effectiveness, it may make the difference.
6. Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something. If the legislator wants information you don't have, or asks something you don't know, tell them and then offer to get the information they are looking for.
7. Be specific about what you are asking for. If you want a vote, information, answers to a question – whatever it is – make sure you ask directly and get an answer.
8. Follow up. It is very important to find out if your legislator did what he/she said they would. It is very important that you then thank them if they did, or ask them for an explanation as to why they did not vote as they said they would, etc...
9. Don't "burn any bridges." It is very easy to get emotional over issues you feel strongly about. That's fine, but be sure that no matter what happens you leave your dealings on good enough terms that you can go back to them. Remember, your strongest opposition on one issue may be your strongest ally on the next.
10. REMEMBER YOU ARE THE BOSS! Your tax money pays the legislators' salaries, pays for the paper they write on, the phone they call you on. You are the employer and they are the employee. You should be courteous, but don't be intimidated. They are responsible to you and nine times out of ten, legislators are grateful for your input.