

HOW TO...

Testify at a NH Public Hearing

Testifying before the NH legislature can be a daunting task to those who have never done it. You need to be well-prepared, should understand how the legislature functions and become familiar with state house etiquette. If you are new to the process, sitting in on a few committee hearings before you testify will help you prepare. Follow these guidelines to help you be as effective as possible.

Etiquette

Becoming familiar with state house etiquette is a crucial part of this process.

- *Know the accepted ways to address legislators.* Do not use first names no matter how well you know them. Appropriate salutations are:
 - Representative jones (insert proper last name) to any representative.
 - Senator jones (insert proper last name) to any senator.
 - Chair of committee is mister chairman or madam chair.
- *Enter and leave public hearings quietly.* Entering and leaving during committee meetings is allowed as long as you are not disruptive.
- *Professional attire is appropriate.* It is a sign of respect to the legislators and will increase your credibility.
- *Avoid positive or negative responses to another person's testimony.* Do not engage in clapping, booing or any other response.
- *Turn off your cell phone.* Electronic devices distract you and others.

House of Representatives

Sign In

A SIGN IN SHEET will be available at a table in the hearing room. Signing in carries weight with the committee; they often look at the sheet and sometimes announce the number of pros and cons.



Fill in:

- Your name
- Whether you favor or oppose the bill, and
- The name of the organization you are representing (or write "self" if you are not representing an organization).

Pink Card

If you intend to testify, you will need to fill out a PINK CARD.

- 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.
- Submit any written testimony that you have prepared at this time.
- 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 to others on the list.

Senate

Sign In

For each bill scheduled for a public hearing there is a SIGN IN SHEET, usually on a clipboard on a table in the hearing room. Signing in carries weight with the committee. They often look at the sheet and sometimes announce the number of pros and cons.

Fill in:

- Your name
- Whether you favor or oppose the bill
- The name of the organization you are representing (or write "self" if you are not representing an organization), and
- A box to check if you would like to speak (no pink cards).

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



Both House and Senate

Testify

- When your name is called proceed to the chair provided and be seated.
- Properly address the chair, introduce yourself, (for example, “For the record, my name is John Doe and I represent the ABC organization”), and begin your testimony.
- If you have prepared written testimony do NOT read your testimony verbatim. They can read it for themselves. You want to engage them in your verbal testimony in a way that reading from a piece of paper will not do.
- The chair may ask you to summarize your remarks. Be prepared to "cut to the chase" if you are asked.
- Most important rule of all: *Do not go over 3 minutes!* Practice at home, time yourself and cut it down until you can say it in 3 minutes or less.

Tips for Successful Testimony

- *Three is the magic number.* Stick to 3 main points that are pertinent to the bill.
- *Prepare for opposition.* You may want to consider addressing an issue that opponents of the bill are likely to bring up.
- *Stay on point and personal.* If you go off topic or go on for too long, you may notice the Representatives are losing interest in what you are saying. Reading testimony always hastens this effect. If this starts to happen, recover. Make your personal, expert appeal.
- *Don't repeat.* If others who have testified before you have already made your points, say so when you are called to speak. The Representatives will appreciate it if you don't repeat what they have just heard.
- *Do your research.* While you may not ask questions, you should be prepared to answer questions from the committee. Do your research to have an idea of which committee members may be for or against the bill on which you are testifying. This will give you advance information as to whether the various Representatives will be asking you a friendly or hostile question.
- *If you don't know the answer, admit it.* Questions may be asked that you don't understand or don't have the information to answer. It is always acceptable to say, “I do not have that information with me, but will provide it to the committee at a later date.”
- *Keep your cool.* Always remain polite and calm, especially in the face of adversity.

