



PUBLIC COMMENT THAT COUNTS

How to be an Effective Ambassador at Legislative Committee Meetings

Any citizen may participate in public comment before a legislative committee by 1) submitting a card stating your position, 2) filing written testimony, or 3) presenting oral testimony.

In all forms of participation, remember that you are acting as an ambassador for your cause. The more diplomatic you are, the more effective your voice will be.

- **TREAD LIGHTLY AND POLITELY**—You catch more flies with honey, so be gracious and respectful.
- **STAY POSITIVE**—Instead of talking about what you are against, talk about what you are for.
- **APPEAL TO THE HEAD AND THE HEART**—Facts and stats are compelling but lead with compassion and champion justice. Compelling personal stories supporting your position can be powerful.
- **BE AS SUCCINCT AS POSSIBLE**—Clearly state the strongest reasons for your position and cite any sources or research you present. Testimony does NOT have to be LONG to be effective!

1—Submitting a Card:

Arrive before the meeting at least 15-30 minutes early and locate cards or a public comment sign-up form:

Committee: _____ Date: _____
Bill#(s): _____

Wish To Speak:

☐ Yes ☐ No

☐ Support Bill ☐ Oppose Bill ☐ Neutral

Time Needed: _____

Please leave a copy of any prepared statement with the committee clerk.

Name: _____

Representing: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Fill in the appropriate information and check a box stating your position on the bill. Regardless of whether you ask to speak, your statement of position will be entered into the public record. Filling out contact information is voluntary, and it is ok (and even recommended) to leave areas, like “representing” blank, unless you are officially representing an organization. Once you complete your card, you can give it to the Clerk or a Sergeant at Arms (who will give it to the clerk if you are unable to do so).

2—Filing Written Testimony:

- Email your testimony to the Committee Clerk in advance of the hearing. The Clerk's contact information will be posted on the meeting notice.
- You can also hand deliver a copy of written testimony to the Clerk or a Sergeant at Arms.
- Because your written testimony will become a public document, don't share any personal contact information that you do not wish to be published.

3—Speaking in Person:

NOTE: It is up to the Committee Chair as to WHO he/she will allow to testify and HOW LONG they are allowed to testify. It can be extremely helpful to reach out to the Committee Chair prior to the meeting to request to speak.

- To offer testimony, it is recommended that you arrive at least 10-15 minutes before the hearing.
- Fill out a card, indicate that you would like to speak, and give your card to the Clerk.
- If you have additional copies of a written testimony, you should present them with your speaker card for the Clerk and legislators. You can look up the committee members ahead of time to make sure you bring enough copies for everyone (<http://www.legislature.mi.gov/>)
- The Chair will take cards from the Clerk and will call your name when ready – you will not know the order ahead of time, so please do not leave the room before your name is called!
- Once the hearing starts, the Chairperson will call speakers by name to approach the microphone.
- It is appropriate to address your testimony to "Distinguished Chair and Distinguished Members of the Committee" or something showing honor to the Representatives.
- Give your name and brief statement of who you are and your position on the bill before jumping into your testimony.
- Unless you are affiliated with an organization, it is generally best to speak as yourself (a private citizen). For Example, John Smith, testifying as a private citizen
- When you conclude, thank them again and remind them of your main point/position

Other Ways to Connect at a Committee Hearing:

- **PRINT COPIES OF YOUR WRITTEN TESTIMONY TO SHARE:** Even if you are not speaking (or in case the chair does not select you to testify), many committees allow individuals to place printed testimony or other information at legislators' seats prior to the start of the meeting. When you submit written testimony to the clerk, it is digitally publicized with the bill documents, but the legislators do not see it unless they intentionally look for it. Bringing a printed copy of your testimony and providing it to legislators can be a helpful way to ensure they actually see it.
- **MIX AND MINGLE:** Before and after the meeting you may have the opportunity to speak with legislators. Thank them for their service or for a good question they asked during the hearing, and take the opportunity build relational bridges. Politely share additional concerns or ask for a time when you could meet with them to share further thoughts, etc.
- **RADIATE RESPECT & POSITIVITY:** Project what you desire; no matter how the opposition or others act, your attitude and peaceful, respectful, positive message should shine through your body language, as well as the words you speak. You are the face of your cause!

"Let your reasonableness be known to everyone." –Philippians 4:5a