



Colorado General Assembly Giving Testimony

In Colorado, citizens are allowed to share their thoughts with elected representatives through testimony at public bill hearings. You may now testify in person or virtually. Here are some tips on giving testimony.

Decorum

Dress professionally.

If online, consider not only how you appear, but what your background looks like.

You may NOT wear stickers or buttons indicating a political stance.

Keep calm and collected. Emotion and passion can get in the way of your success.

No food or drinks are allowed in the committee room.

Be sure to bring your glasses, and a pen or pencil to take notes or edit your testimony.

Never clap or cheer.

You will note that some legislators don't seem to be paying attention...ignore this.

Sign-In

You must now register on-line before the committee convenes (best to do so anytime before one hour of its convening). To do this, go to <https://leg.colorado.gov>. Then click on the Committees drop down. Select Public Testimony Options. We suggest watching the video. You will need to indicate what bill you are testifying on. Example: Select Committee name, then select the meeting date and time, and then select the hearing item (bill number) and whether you are in support, opposition or neutral.

Chairman of the Committee

The Chair controls the hearing. He or she will likely institute a limit on the total number minutes you may speak, generally 3 minutes, but often limited to 2 minutes when there are many signed up. The order of testimony is up to the chair, who may have consulted with the bill sponsor(s) on the order of testimony. Generally, state officials and experts will likely go first. Lately, they have been calling witnesses up in groups of four. The chair will call your name when it is your turn to speak. If on-line, wait until you are called and begin speaking. Make sure you are not muted. Try to avoid saying "can you hear me?" Just start. They will interrupt you if you are not audible.

Your Testimony

Having a written statement or notes may be a helpful aid. It helps you to be comfortable with what you are saying, and keeps you from deviating too far and forgetting to say what you intended. Nevertheless, being quite familiar with your statement makes it less likely to sound as if it is being read. It is likely you will have only 2 to 3 minutes.

You may wish to have a longer and shorter version of your talk handy. Make notations on what you can cut. In the interest of time, if previous speakers have stated your points, consider cutting them.

Structure of remarks

Opening: Example: Thank you Madame Chair, I am, and I'm speaking for (organization or self). Note: you should not claim you are speaking for a group unless you have its permission. You might indicate your affiliation, but note that you are speaking for yourself.).

State Position: Example: I'm here today to speak in opposition to Senate Bill _____-.

Establish your credibility: Why you are there. Personal experience. (I am a Colorado native, lived here __ years, hunter, gun owner, parent, teacher faith leader, physician, etc.)

Share your story: You don't have to be an expert, just tell why you are testifying. If you are a survivor of gun violence, it is very important to share that in your testimony. Discuss what is the real-world impact of this bill. Be respectful: **DO NOT make any statements that are critical of a specific legislator, other person or make election threats.**

You may provide copies of printed information to the committee. Give these to the clerk at the end of your statement.

Closing: Summarize your points, reiterate your request for a NO (or YES) vote.

Questions

If asked a question after your statement, wait for the chair to grant permission to respond.

If a legislator speaks to you in a testy manner, **DO NOT respond in kind.**

If you do not know the answer to a question, indicate that "I don't have the answer, let me get back with you." And be sure to get back to them.

Do not feel you need to respond to a legislator who is pontificating and does not pose a question. Generally, the chair will state that to you.

Committee Decisions

In most cases in Colorado, a vote on the bill is taken during that very committee hearing.

After all testimony is taken on a particular bill, the chair will declare the testimony phase of the hearing is closed. The chair will then coordinate discussion among the committee members.

The chair will then ask if there are amendments. The bill sponsor may even provide amendments to the bill. Discussion will follow between legislators as each amendment is considered. You will have no voice in this. A vote on each amendment is immediately taken.

Before voting on the amended bill, there will be more discussion. Lately, members have stated why they are voting the way they are voting just before the roll call.

If the bill fails to have a majority of votes, a committee member will move that the bill be PI'ed (postponed indefinitely). A majority yes vote on a PI means the bill is totally dead and cannot be brought back up for consideration (at least under the same bill number).

If the bill passes, it will go on to the next committee or the floor of the chamber (committee of the whole). Then ... they're on to the next bill.