

MPGV Tips for Testifying



Testifying in person is not as daunting as it seems. Here are some tips to make it a rewarding experience:

1. The first thing to remember is you are testifying as a citizen (unless you are testifying on behalf of an organization). You do not have to be a subject matter expert and you do not need to worry about appearing a little nervous.
2. Hearing times do not indicate the precise time that the bill will come up for testimony. The order of bills is indicated just before the hearing begins and will give some indication of how long the wait will be. However, committees may change the order at any time so be alert for that.
3. It is okay to leave the room if you are not up soon, and to work while you are in the room. There is free public wi-fi using: LOGIN: guest; PASSWORD: mdga. It isn't great, but it is free.
4. You will only have 2-3 minutes to speak (usually 2 so plan for that). There is a visible clock when you are at the desk or standing at the podium. Practice with a timer to ensure that you can finish within the allotted time. You may ask to complete your final thought and that is normally granted but you will be cut off if you do not wrap up promptly. If you can say what you want in less time than allowed, then stop talking. You do not need to fill the space to be effective.
5. It is fine to read from prepared remarks. Remember, you are not expected to be a professional testifier.
6. Consider starting by addressing the senate JPR committee with "Chair Smith, Vice-Chair Waldstreicher, and distinguished members of the Committee" or for the house Judiciary with "Chair Clippinger, Vice-Chair Moon ..." Then, state your name and the town you live in. Next state the bill's number and title, and whether you are testifying in support or in opposition to the bill.
7. Tell the Committee if you have experience (career or personal) that speaks to a unique perspective (are you a survivor, an ER doctor, a teacher, etc.).
8. If other speakers have already made your point, you can say that you agree with their remarks, which may let you touch on other points not previously discussed. If there is an issue that was brought up previously that you do not believe was adequately addressed, you can respond if you wish.
9. When you finish, remain at the microphone for a moment in case committee members want to ask questions. Answer concisely and respectfully even when you are being challenged or your remarks misconstrued.
10. If you get a question you can't answer, it is okay to say you do not know. If it is a technical question, you may say, "I'm sorry, but I'm not able to answer your question. However, the Executive Director of Marylanders to Prevent Gun Violence is here, and I'm sure she would be willing to get back to you after the hearing with an answer."
11. Both houses now have an option to testify virtually. Simply follow the directions sent to you by committee staff. The same rules apply as to timing.
12. After questioning, thank the Committee and return to your seat, or leave if you wish.

Thank you so much for taking the time, effort, and courage to testify. It makes a big difference when legislators hear from citizens in their own words, telling their own stories.

Questions? Contact us at karen@mdpgv.org