



Tips on Presenting Oral and Written Testimony to the D.C. City Council

There are two kinds of testimony—**oral** and **written**. If you testify orally (in person), bring printed copies of your testimony with you. If you can't appear in person, you may submit written testimony instead, by following the instructions on the Notice of Hearing. Written testimony should usually be fewer than 2 pages but could be lengthier if necessary. When you testify in person, the Chairperson will usually keep the testimony to 3 minutes.

Tip: Prepare your written testimony first and then cut it down to the bare essentials when you testify in person.

Preparing your Testimony

1. **Introduce yourself by name, and include identifying information**, such as “I’m a resident of Ward 7,” “I represent X organization,” or “I have personal experience with the subject matter of this hearing.”
2. **Be confident and polite.** Always start by greeting the chairperson of the committee by name and then the committee. At the end, thank them for the opportunity to testify. Even when you strongly disapprove of positions the government has taken, stay focused on your message and remain positive. You can certainly be critical of government agencies, but avoid disparaging remarks.
3. **State which issue or issues you will address among those the committee is considering.** Outline briefly what you will be discussing.
4. **When the government has done something positive, say so.** Not only do they need to know what they’re doing right, you will rightly be seen as someone who can be objective and balanced.
5. **Tell the committee what you want them to do!** This is so important. If you are testifying regarding a bill, you will likely be asking them either to *support*, or *modify*, or *not vote* for the bill. At a performance oversight hearing, you will be asking the committee to *evaluate* the way a current District program is performing.
6. **Give the committee some motivation to take the action you recommend.** How will the action you recommend improve the current situation? Do you have personal experience that could help the committee understand how the issue affects D.C. residents such as you?

Why Testify?

Testifying is an excellent opportunity for the government to hear the concerns of the people they serve. Whether you want to advocate ending homelessness, closing educational and economic gaps, or voicing your concerns about a lack of food access across all eight wards in D.C., you are able to deliver a clear message to key decision-makers.

The SOME Advocacy Team welcomes the opportunity to provide additional advice about testimony on issues related to homelessness and poverty. Please feel free to e-mail us at advocacy@some.org. We would also be very interested in receiving copies of testimony you submit.