

Useful Tips for Providing Effective Testimony

ALWAYS remember that public officials usually make decisions outside of public testimony -- so effective lobbying is not done during testimony, it is done before and after.

1. Introduce yourself, the organization you represent. Some jurisdictions require you to provide your address.
2. State your position on the proposal expressing support or concerns.
3. State the problem that needs to be addressed briefly. A few sentences highlighting the issue will do.
4. State your proposed solution briefly. Again, a few sentences will do.
5. Outline materials submitted for the record, or suggestions you want to offer to the proposal.
6. Summarize your position briefly and ask for their support of a specific action.

Brevity is the Best Policy

Comments should be limited to 3 minutes and must be no longer than 5 minutes -- public officials, like most of us, do not have the attention span for too much information at one time. Do not provide too much detail or too many facts. Save the details for the information you submit for the record. Testimony is generally only useful to make your position public and put it in the record. Challenges to decisions are based on what is submitted in the record! Do not over testify. Often, people raise unwanted questions by providing too much information. Briefly make your case. Let the officials ask you questions based on your testimony and materials you submit; if they want more information let them follow up on issues they are interested in.

Submitting Documents

Submit information, supporting documents and materials for the record - do not read what you submit, but do refer to what you submit -- simply outline the information and highlight the key points you want to make or information you want public officials to take note of. Provide sufficient copies for all public officials and staff. Remember that local decisions are based on "findings of fact" and staff-prepared "recommended actions." If you support the proposal, it is still important to get information in the record in case "the other side" challenges the decision.

The Proper Approach

Be professional -- show you care, but do not get emotional. ALWAYS be respectful, courteous never accusatory, derogatory -- remember that public officials almost always have a bond with staff as they rely on them heavily and usually trust them.

Also, public officials need to know when they are doing the right thing. Too often, they only get barraged by the opposition -- many times stopping good projects/proposals from being adopted.

If you oppose the proposal, start by stating that you understand and appreciate the problem they are trying to address. Then, state your concerns with the proposed solutions.

Always Present a Solution

Always recommend an alternative that better addresses the problem. "We appreciate the need to protect our environment ... However, we are concerned with the proposed action because it will ... We suggest a better approach would be to ..." This is critical because if a proposal is being heard, most bodies will likely take action. By being prepared and offering specific solutions in writing, this will offer them an immediate alternative to consider. Also, be sure to offer amendments to the "findings of fact" in addition to your proposed solution as this will be the findings that courts will review, if the decision is appealed.

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