

HOW TO TESTIFY AT A COMMITTEE HEARING

During the committee work periods and throughout the legislative session, public hearings are held on many bills. An effective presentation by a concerned citizen will often have a great impact on the ultimate fate of a bill. Legislators depend on lobbyists to inform them on the issue and industry positions, but they want to hear from those who are directly affected by a legislative proposal, they want to hear from you!

- Double-check the date, time and room number for the hearing. You can verify this information at the legislative website at www.legis.state.wi.us. You can also find committee members at this website.
- Obtain the names of the members of the committee that will be hearing the bill. If possible, it is advantageous to call the committee members at least a day before the hearing to discuss your position and find out what questions they may have that could be answered at the hearing. This also makes them familiar with you before you testify.
- When you arrive at the hearing room, fill out a registration form that they will have available. State your name, address and whom, if anyone, you are representing. Also indicate whether you are appearing in favor or opposition to the bill, or for information only.
- Be prepared to wait. There may be bills scheduled to be heard before yours. It is also difficult to judge how long each speaker will take. Don't be surprised if you have to wait for some time before you are called to speak.
- Be well prepared. Have your points and thoughts logically organized for your presentation. You should also bring copies of a written statement, which you can hand out to the committee members. It is best to speak to the committee and not read your statement word for word.
- In your opening remarks, identify yourself and describe your business operation or association membership. Show that you are qualified to speak about the matter, either because it affects you directly or because you have expertise in the area.
- Keep your presentation fairly brief and to the point. Speak in a normal manner, using everyday language to explain the effects of the proposed legislation on your business or on the business of your customers.
- Do not attempt to answer questions if you do not have the information or are not sure of the facts. Bluffing is easily recognized and you will lose credibility. Offer to provide additional information after the meeting or defer the question to someone else.
- Be courteous. Address the chairperson and members of the committee each time you speak or answer a member's question. Don't let nit picking or other upsetting behaviors by committee members cause you to become angry or flustered.
- When you are finished, thank the committee for the opportunity to appear.
- If you promised to provide additional material after the hearing, be sure to do so as soon as possible. This will add to your credibility as a witness.