

State House Committee Hearings A Primer

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with thanks to the Office of Rep. Carl Sciortino

Legislative Committees hold public hearings to hear testimony—both in favor and against—legislation that has been filed in the Senate and the House of Representatives. Hearings are led by the House and/or Senate chairpersons of the committee, and some of the other members of the committee will also be present at the hearing. A list of committees and their members can be found at <http://www.mass.gov/legis/commenu.htm>

What to Prepare: 3 Minutes and a 1 Page Letter

Spoken testimony is limited to approximately three minutes. You should prepare to speak for only 3 minutes and be ready to stop speaking if asked to do so by one of the committee chairs. Testimony should open with *a brief introduction*, including name, residence, and background relevant to the bill (for example, “I am a parent of a transgender daughter,” “I am a transgender man who works at...” “My mother is a transgender woman...”). Then you can go into the substance of your testimony.

To make up for the brief allotted speaking time, please also prepare detailed written testimony. If you are uncomfortable providing oral testimony, you can choose to submit only written testimony. Address your testimony to the House and Senate chairs of the committee. Please send a copy of your testimony to the MTPC volunteer who you have been in contact with as soon as possible and prior to the hearing. The written testimony will be given to all of the committee members.

After you have completed your testimony, members of the committee may wish to ask you further questions. *Do not feel obligated to answer any questions that you don't know the answer to; legal and technical questions about the bill can be answered by the attorneys who are working with MTPC. Your testimony is an opportunity for the legislators to meet the people and communities that this bill will protect and to understand why this bill is needed.*

Legislative hearings are open to the public and written testimony becomes public record.

Be Courteous, Be Relaxed, and Be Yourself

It is understandable to be a little nervous, but you don't need to be. While some legislators may not be very knowledgeable about transgender issues, their questions will be well-intentioned and genuine. They will be patient and understanding whether or not you are not used to public speaking.

The Day of the Hearing: What to Expect

You should plan on arriving 15 minutes before the hearing is scheduled to begin to check in with an MTPC volunteer and to sign up to testify.

Often, a staff person for the committee will be outside of the hearing room with a sign-up list. Alternately, you may find the staff person sitting inside the hearing room at the corner of the long desk for committee members. (If you arrive after the hearing has begun, you may quietly approach the staff person and sign up to testify.)

Testimony is heard one bill at a time, but you may not know the order in advance of the hearing. Many bills are often heard at each hearing. Once you sign up to testify, you should plan on waiting patiently for your bill and your name to be called.

Testimony from legislators will be taken out of order as they arrive to speak. This is standard procedure, and you should not feel offended if a legislator goes ahead of you. Also, members of the committee may come and go during the course of the hearing, especially if there are legislative matters being voted on at the same time. This is also standard procedure.

The committee will strive to ensure that all who appear to speak are given the opportunity to do so. If the bill you are interested in has come and gone and your name has not been called, you should approach the staff person to make sure that they know you are waiting.