



Colorado General Assembly Giving Testimony

In Colorado, citizens are allowed to share their thoughts with elected representatives through testimony at public bill hearings. Here are some tips on giving testimony.

Decorum

Dress professionally.

You may NOT wear stickers or buttons indicating a political stance.

Keep calm and collected. Emotion and passion can get in the way of your success.

No food or drinks are allowed in the committee room.

Be sure to bring your glasses, and a pen or pencil to take notes or edit your testimony.

Arrive on time and sign in on the sheets provided at the entry.

Never clap or cheer.

You will note that some legislators don't seem to be paying attention...ignore this.

Chairman of the Committee

The Chair controls the hearing. He or she will likely institute a limit on the total number minutes you may speak. The order of testimony is up to the chair, who may have consulted with lobbyists on the order of testimony, in which case state officials and experts will likely go first.

When called, shake hands with the bill sponsor and take your seat at the table next to the sponsor.

Your Testimony

Have a written statement so that you are comfortable with what you are saying. This keeps you from deviating too far and forgetting to say what you intended. Nevertheless, being quite familiar with your statement makes it less likely to sound as if it is being read. It is likely you will have only 2 to 3 minutes.

You may wish to have a longer and shorter version of your talk handy. Make notations on what you can cut. In the interest of time, if previous speakers have stated your points, consider cutting them.

Structure of remarks

Opening: Example: Thank you Madame Chair, I am, and I'm speaking for (organization or self – NOTE: you should not claim you are speaking for a group unless you have the permission of the group. You might indicate your affiliation, but note that you are speaking for yourself.).

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State Position: Example: I'm here today to speak in opposition to Senate Bill _____.
Establish your credibility: Why you are there. Personal experience. (I am a Colorado native, lived here ___ years, hunter, gun owner, parent, teacher, religious leader, physician, etc.).

Share your story: You don't have to be an expert, just tell why you are testifying. If you are a victim of gun violence, it is very important to share that in your testimony. Discuss what is the real-world impact of this bill. Be respectful: avoid any statements that are critical of a specific legislator, person or make election threats.

You may provide copies of printed information to the committee. Give these to the clerk at the end of your statement.

Closing: Summarize your points, reiterate your request for a NO (or YES) vote, and thank the chair for the opportunity to speak.

Questions

If asked a question after your statement, wait for the chair to give you permission to respond.

If a legislator speaks to you in a testy manner, DO NOT respond in kind.

If you do not know the answer to a question, indicate that "I don't have the answer, let me get back with you."

Do not feel you need to respond to a legislator who is pontificating and does not pose a question.

Committee Decisions

In most cases in Colorado, a vote on the bill is taken during that very committee hearing. After all testimony is taken on a particular bill, the chair will declare the testimony phase of the hearing is closed. The chair will then coordinate discussion among the committee members.

The chair will then ask if there are amendments. The bill sponsor may even provide amendments to the bill. Discussion will follow as each amendment is considered. You will have no voice in this. A vote on each amendment is immediately taken.

Before voting on the amended bill, there will be more discussion. Lately, members have stated why they are voting the way they are voting just before the roll call.

If the bill fails to have a majority of votes, a committee member will move that the bill be PI'ed (postponed indefinitely). An affirmative vote on a PI means the bill is totally dead and cannot be brought back up for consideration (at least under the same bill number).

If the bill passes, it will go on to the next committee or the floor of the chamber (committee of the whole).

Then ... they're on to the next bill.