

# TIPS FOR TESTIFYING IN PERSON

*Getting ready to testify on a bill can be overwhelming and exhausting. Not only are there a lot of things to know and understand about a bill, you may also be sorting through emotional responses to the bill and how it might impact you or other people you care about. Trust your gut and check in with yourself throughout the process. You know yourself better than anyone else so don't be afraid to change your mind about what you are doing if you need to. Here are some tips that may help you as you prepare, and even after you have finished.*

## Preparing to Testify

Print 12-15 copies of your written testimony for the committee no later than one day before the hearing date. Being prepared will help you avoid the last-minute rushing around or forgetting things, so you can get to the Capitol and focus on yourself and your testimony.

Read your written testimony to yourself no more than three times the day of the hearing. Once you get to the hearing, try not to read what you wrote until you sit down to testify. Reading your written testimony while waiting can increase anxious feelings and make it harder to read when it is finally your turn.

Remember that what you wrote down and what you say may not be the same thing, and that is okay. Often, you can have more of an impact if you summarize what you wrote down instead of reading it word for word.

## Waiting to Testify

Sometimes there is a wait before it's time for your bill to be discussed. It can be helpful to sit in the hearing room and observe how the hearings are going and listen to other testimony about different bills being heard, but this can also be overwhelming and bring up a lot of thoughts and feelings. You may need to use some coping skills (see "Tips for Taking Care of Yourself" in *Survivors Speak*). Do what is right for you to keep you feeling safe.

There will probably be quite a few people in the hearing room, some you may know and others you may not know. You may have to sit in a space you wouldn't normally choose to sit – such as the middle of the room – so be ready for this. There may also be people or organizations involved that do not share your support or opposition to the bill. While this might be a reason for you to have a conversation with them about their position, don't take it personally if you don't agree with each other at that time.

If you notice others sharing things you were going to say, or testimony of others reminds you of things you wanted to say, make a legible note on your copy so that you can adjust what you will say when it is your turn.

## When It's Your Turn to Testify

If you are in support the bill, you will testify when the committee chair asks for 'proponents.' If you are against the bill, you will testify when the committee chair asks for 'opponents.' If you are neutral about the bill, you will testify when the committee chair asks for those testifying in 'neutral capacity.' The committee chair will ask for proponents to testify first. Sometimes the sponsoring senator will have asked specific people to testify, you will notice they sit closest to the table and move to other seats after they have finished. Move to the row of seats nearest the testifier table and move closer as others finish testifying so that you can get to the testifier table when they are done.

## Starting Your Testimony

When it is your turn, go to the testifier table and sit down. Give your testifier sheet and copies of your written testimony, if you brought copies, to the clerk or page. When you sit, the indicator light goes green and this means your time has begun. Introduce yourself and spell out your first and last name for the record if it is safe for you to do so. If it is not safe for you to use your legal name, state this for the record and introduce yourself by another name of your choosing. If you have a support person with you at the table, let the committee know that person's name and that they are there for your support. Say hello to the committee members, thank them for letting you share, and then read your testimony or share what you came to say.

## Ending Your Testimony

Typically, you will have 3-5 minutes to testify. The committee chair will announce the length of time at the beginning of the hearing. When you have one-minute left, you will see the indicator light go to yellow, and you will know you need to finish your testimony. When you see the red light, you need to end your sharing if you haven't already. Be sure to thank the committee for letting you speak and let them know if you are willing to answer questions. It is best to wait at the table until the chair tells you to step down or says, "next testifier."

## Questions from the Committee

Sometimes the committee members will ask you questions about what you shared, but not about the bill. The kinds of questions they may ask could be about the work you do, your experiences, or your opinion about something specific. If you do not know the answer, or aren't comfortable answering at that time, it is okay to tell them you would rather not discuss that at this time, or that you aren't sure. It is also okay to give them your contact information so they can reach out later, if you are comfortable with that.

## After Your Testimony

When you are done sharing, you may want to leave or find some private space to process – there are quiet rooms at the capitol you can use for this. You may find that someone will want to talk to you after the hearing to ask more questions about what you shared. You do not have to speak with anyone you are not comfortable talking to, no matter who it is. It is also okay to leave and head back home when you are done. If you would like, you can also stay and listen to the rest of the hearings that are scheduled for the day – it is entirely up to you. No matter what you do, be sure to take care of yourself (see "Tips for Taking Care of Yourself" in *Survivors Speak*). You can follow the progress of legislative bills after the hearing by making sure you are signed up for a listserv (see "Support Resources" Appendix in *Survivors Speak*) or using a bill tracker.

## Resources

- Bill tracker: <https://www.nebraska.gov/billtracker/>
- Search for a Bill: <https://nebraskalegislature.gov/bills/>
- List of Committees: <https://nebraskalegislature.gov/committees/committees.php>
- Search for a Hearing: [https://nebraskalegislature.gov/calendar/hearings\\_range.php](https://nebraskalegislature.gov/calendar/hearings_range.php)

**"Tips for Testifying in Person" is part of *Survivors Speak: How to share your story to advocate for legislative change in Nebraska*. For more information about how you can share your story to advocate for change, check out the full guide at <https://survivorsrisingomaha.org/survivors-speak/>. Please do not reproduce or alter without express written permission from Survivors Rising.**