

Guidelines for Speakers and Spectators

Council rules protect your right to testify and be heard even if others in the hearing room disagree with you. Council rules also ensure that those attending the hearing can express their views as long as they do not interfere with the rights of others to see and hear the proceedings. At all times, order and decorum will be maintained in keeping with the dignity of the legislative process.

You may wear badges, armbands or other articles of clothing that signal your point of view provided that they do not extend beyond the body or interfere with the vision of other persons at the hearing. **Placards and posters are not permitted.** They create a hazard of inadvertent injury to others, particularly when the room is crowded. In addition, the Council asks that you do not applaud, boo, cheer or make any audible expressions of agreement or disagreement to avoid delaying the testimony of others or disrupting the hearing. **The use of cellular phones is prohibited.**

Further Information

Public hearings in the Chamber are televised live on City Cable 13. You can also watch Council proceedings on our website.

Copies of legislation may be obtained by contacting the **Legislative Services Division** at 202-724-8050 or visiting **Room 10**. You can also obtain copies of legislation from the Council's website via LIMS.

For hearing updates, call 202-724-8000 or check the calendar on the Council's website.

COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA COUNCIL PERIOD 21

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COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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An Easy Guide to Testifying before the Council



**COUNCIL OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

A Message from the Chairman of the Council

Welcome to the Council of the District of Columbia. We appreciate that you are taking the time to share your views with us on matters before the Council. We believe that public participation is critical to our decision-making process whether we are considering a new law, examining government performance, or adopting the annual budget.

Council rules and procedures build in opportunities for public input in the legislative process from the introduction of proposed legislation, its review by a committee, to consideration and vote by the Council. A public hearing is a key component of our deliberative process and allows you to communicate your views in person to the Council.

In this brochure, we will explain the process and what to expect when you appear to testify at a public hearing. Thank you for being an involved citizen. You can help make a better government and a better city. Your opinions matter.

Sincerely,

Phil Mendelson
Chairman of the Council

Speaking at a Public Hearing or Roundtable

When a bill or proposed resolution is introduced, the Chairman refers it to a committee to consider the policy, analyze its fiscal impact, determine its effect on existing law and recommend action by the Council. A committee schedules a public hearing or roundtable to solicit public comment. Notices of proceedings are published in the D.C. Register.

Anyone can sign up to testify by contacting the appropriate committee. Hearing and roundtable notices provide a deadline before which a person must contact the committee to be permitted to testify. Each person who complies with the committee's requirements shall be given an opportunity to testify. A person who fails to comply with the requirements may not testify unless the committee chair allows the person to testify.

You are encouraged to bring written testimony with you or provide it to the committee prior to the hearing or roundtable. Please bring at least thirteen (13) copies for circulation to the Members. If you do not have your testimony in writing you may still be able to testify.

When it is your turn to testify, your name will be called by the committee chair. Witnesses generally receive three minutes to present testimony. You should begin your testimony by addressing the chairperson and committee members. State your name, whether you are testifying on behalf of a group or organization, and why you are there. For example, "Chairperson and members of the committee, my name is Joan D. Public from the House of Ideas, Inc. I'm in favor of the bill because..."

What to Expect at a Public Hearing

The committee chair opens the hearing or roundtable, explains the purpose of the proceeding and provides the ground rules. The committee chair follows the order of speakers listed on the agenda circulated at least 24 hours before the proceeding. A committee chair may schedule government officials first to promote a status report to the public, or government officials may be scheduled at the end of the proceeding so that they may hear and respond to public comments. A committee chair may also have similar organizations testify together. The measure's co-introducer(s) may speak, and other Members present may make brief statements.

Witnesses often use their time to summarize more extensive written testimony which is submitted for the record. The committee chair or Members may ask questions to elicit more information, or clarification. Be specific and to the point. If you know the answer to a question, or want time to provide an answer just say so. However, please confine your remarks to the question under discussion.

Please keep in mind that other citizens have signed up to testify. If you are asked to summarize your oral testimony, please comply with the committee chair's request. The committee chair maintains order in the proceeding and after issuing a warning may order the removal of a disorderly person.

Language translators and sign language interpreters can be provided if you contact the committee at least five business days in advance of the hearing or roundtable. Service animals will be admitted to hearing rooms. The Council Chamber is equipped with an assistive hearing system and the John A. Wilson Building is equipped with handicapped accessible doors.