

# **A Guide to Preparing and Giving Legislative Testimony**

## **I. Introduction**

*Whether you are planning to speak at a legislative hearing or just submit written testimony, this guide will help you deliver an effective message.*

Giving legislative testimony is an opportunity not to be taken lightly. It is one of the most effective ways to educate legislators and policymakers about the impact, either positive or negative, that proposed legislation or legislative change might have, especially for specific groups of individuals such as the elderly or persons with disabilities who may not be able to testify themselves. Legislators aren't always aware of all the implications a particular piece of legislation may have on their constituents, especially on underserved individuals. Providing this testimony and education clearly and professionally is important, and can dramatically help you or your organization achieve the results you are seeking.

The following tutorial includes guidelines for preparing, writing, and giving testimony, and includes an example of actual testimony given at a public hearing of the Connecticut legislature. While the examples are specific to Connecticut, this guide may be helpful and applicable to developing legislative testimony in other states as well.

## **II. Guidelines for Testifying Before the Legislature**

- Your testimony should be short – typically no longer than 3 to 5 minutes. Speak from your own personal experience.
- Since you may be submitting copies of your testimony for distribution to your state legislators, it is probably best to type your testimony.
- When preparing your written testimony for distribution, type on one side of the paper only and double-space all your testimony for ease of reading. It is also helpful to use a large enough text size to be read comfortably.
- Follow this outline when preparing your statement:
  1. Identify yourself and the organization you represent;
  2. State your position as "for" or "against" the proposed bill and identify the bill by name and number, if applicable;
  3. Summarize your recommendations first, and then add explanation;
  4. Restate your position at the end of your testimony; and
  5. Thank the committee for the opportunity to speak.
- Rehearse your testimony! Anticipate questions you might be asked and practice answering them.

- Arrive early and sign-up, if needed. Make sure you follow any procedures that have been published, and indicate that you wish to testify. Generally, speakers will testify in the same order as their names appear on the sign-up sheet. Note, however, that some committees are now using a lottery system to determine the order in which people will testify.
- Bring enough copies of your prepared statement for the entire committee, if needed. Be sure the committee clerk has a copy for the official record of the hearing. They may ask for up to 50 or 60 copies of your testimony.
- If your testimony is very technical, ask the committee clerk to hand out copies of your testimony to the committee before you testify.
- If there is a microphone, speak directly into it (keep the mike about 6 inches from your mouth). If necessary, move or adjust the microphone. If you cannot be heard, your testimony will not be effective, regardless of how carefully your statement was prepared.
- Do not repeat points made by speakers ahead of you. If all the points you wanted to make have been made, tell the committee you agree with the testimony given by the preceding speakers and urge them to take the appropriate action.
- Answer only those questions that you can answer correctly, and answer as clearly and succinctly as you can. Offer to find the answers to other questions and promptly get back to the committee members with the information.
- If several people are speaking from the same organization, divide up the points to be made with each speaker addressing different areas.
- Do not argue with members of the committee or with people giving opposing testimony.
- Put copies of your testimony into the mailboxes at the Capitol of committee members who were not present at the hearing, if appropriate.
- Keep a copy of your statement for your files.
- If you have valid or interesting testimony, but have not prepared a statement, or if you discover after listening to others that there is something you urgently wish to contribute, then at the end of the hearing, ask to speak.

*Adapted by Shana Judge from Advocacy Unlimited (2019). See original version at [http://www.mindlink.org/online\\_courses/legis\\_testimony\\_1.html](http://www.mindlink.org/online_courses/legis_testimony_1.html)*

### III. Example Testimony

Testimony for Public Hearing  
[Name of Legislative Committee]  
[Date]

Your Full Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

S.B. No. 246 (Committee) - An Act Concerning a Commission on Federal Stimulus Distribution.

Good Afternoon Appropriations Committee Members. My name is (first name, last name) and I am an Advocacy Unlimited (AU) advocate and educator. I am also the founder and chapter leader of the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance of Greater Hartford (DBSA). Advocacy Unlimited is a statewide advocacy organization that offers education in self, systems and legislative advocacy skills for persons with, or in recovery from, psychiatric disabilities or co-occurring disorders through its Advocacy Education Course. Since 1995, over 420 advocates have graduated from 55 classes held across the state of Connecticut in our program.

AU and DBSA Greater Hartford represent hundreds of Connecticut residents in recovery from psychiatric disabilities who have been impacted by the economic downturn and who rely on psychiatric medications to support them in their recovery from severe mental illnesses. I am here today to ask you to reject the cuts to prescription coverage proposed by the Governor's budget. I am here today to ask you not to let Connecticut's older adults and people with disabilities be hurt by the same proposed cuts.

- Continue to cover drugs not on Medicare Part D formularies that are covered by ConnPACE and Medicaid.
- Continue to cover Part D co-pays for dually eligible Medicaid and Medicare participants, who are very low income older adults and people with disabilities.
- Safeguard ConnPACE-do not unduly restrict access or limit the enrollment period.
- Do not impose new prior authorization requirements for Medicaid-covered drugs.

I am here to ask you to ensure that CT's lower income older adults and people with disabilities are not hurt by the Governor's proposal to cut the Part D Wrap Around and ConnPACE!

While I am speaking as an advocate for all those I know and have spoken to who will be detrimentally affected by the Governor's proposal to cut the Part D Wrap Around and ConnPACE, I also have personal experience with both ConnPACE and Medicare Part D. You see, I am one of the more fortunate individuals in CT because I have full-time employment. However, I was just hired. From December 20, 2008 until January 14 of this year I was between employments. If it were not for samples of cholesterol medication I received from my

endocrinologist and samples of my psych med I received from my counseling center, I would have gone without medication. Each medication was hundreds of dollars, my psych med over \$300 even with Medicare Part D. Needless to say, jobless, I could not afford the medication necessary for my own recovery. Before December 20, I worked as a VISTA Member for three years so I had a health benefit from the Corporation of National and Community Service. My prescriptions during that period were free. As I said, I am one of the more fortunate in my recovery community. Because of my social security disability and living allowance, I wasn't eligible for ConnPACE, but thank God, I didn't have to use Medicare Part D. In fact, I haven't used my Medicare Part D because I couldn't afford the premiums or the co-pays after rent, utilities, transportation and other necessities. Today, I have private insurance and a job, so the co-pays are manageable, but I still have not been able to get one of my necessary cholesterol medications because I am awaiting prior authorization. Since the samples ran out, I've had to go without this medication for weeks.

I tell you my story, not to win your sympathy, but rather your vote to ensure that those less fortunate than me, the very lower income older adults, people with disabilities, and those somewhere in between, will not have to choose between rent and utilities, food, and transportation and medicines, especially the more expensive psych meds.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

(Sign your name)

\*Adapted from the following source URL:

[http://www.mindlink.org/online\\_courses/legis\\_testimony\\_1.html](http://www.mindlink.org/online_courses/legis_testimony_1.html)