

## Influence the decision makers...

The Ohio General Assembly makes many of its decisions regarding Ohio's environment based in part on testimony from the public. Public testimony becomes part of the official record for an issue and can send a strong message to decision makers and the media about the public's position on a matter. Hearings can also be important legally. If you think that you may be part of an appeal on an issue at some point, you should recognize that your legal standing will likely be based on whether or not you took part in the public comment period for that issue.

### Writing testimony

#### Introduce yourself

Begin your testimony by offering your name and also your profession (if you feel it is appropriate). If you are representing an organization, briefly describe your group. Only one member of an organization should officially testify on behalf of the group. If others in the group wish to testify, they should do so as individuals.

#### Summarize

Before describing your position in detail, briefly describe the points that you will be covering to give listeners an idea of what your testimony will cover.

#### Back it up

Provide brief, logical arguments as to why you are supporting a certain position on an issue. If you can tell a story about how the issue that you are writing about will affect you or your family, be sure to include that information. Also, try to include specific facts to back up your position. If you need help developing this portion of your testimony, contact the OEC for fact sheets and white papers on environmental issues.

#### Include the listener

Make your testimony more neutral by using "we" rather than "I" whenever possible to make your audience feel included. Of course, when introducing yourself or telling a personal anecdote you will need to use the first person.

#### Be courteous

After introducing yourself, thank your audience for the opportunity to submit testimony on the issue. Make sure that your testimony is polite, logical, and articulate throughout and



avoid negative and confrontational language. Let the strength of your testimony come from the facts that you include. End your testimony with another thank you.

### Preparing to testify

Although you can usually simply submit written testimony on an issue, it is highly recommended that you appear in person and present your statement orally. Oral testimony is far more powerful and persuasive than a written statement. Before you attend a public hearing, spend time preparing by taking the following steps:

#### Confirm the details

Verify the date, time and location of the meeting a couple of days beforehand. Also, find out which portion of the meeting will be dedicated to public comment and what time you must arrive if you want to speak. **Ask about the time limit for testimony and practice to be sure that you will not be cut off.**

#### Sign up

Check to see if you can sign up to speak in advance. At many meetings, however, you will have to wait and sign up at the door.



## Preparing to testify (cont'd.)

### Know your stuff.

Research the issue that you will be speaking about and be sure to include facts in your statement that will back up your position. Practice your testimony out loud until it is smooth and fits within the time allotment. Also, consider what questions legislators might ask and be prepared to answer them.

### Point out alternatives.

If you are opposing a bill or a plan, do not simply say why it is a bad idea. Whenever possible try to include alternatives to bad proposals. This will help your testimony to be more positive and will help to show that you understand the issue and are reasonable.

### Bring visuals

If you can, bring visual aids such as pictures, maps, etc. to strengthen your testimony.

### Gather support

Check with friends, family members and co-workers to see who can attend the hearing to support you. Make sure that the people that you bring can be identified visually as supporting your position (for example, everyone can wear green buttons that say something like "Support SB \_\_\_\_"). A sign-in sheet will most likely be provided and will probably have a place for participants to mark their position on the issue. Be sure that all your supporters sign in so that those who do not testify are still on record as having attended to support your position.

### Bring copies

Print copies of your final testimony to distribute to the committee members or agency representatives. Also bring a few extra copies to pass out to reporters.

## Testifying

### Breathe and relax

While you are waiting for your turn to speak take deep breathes to relax yourself. Once you are feeling relaxed, try to concentrate your attention on the meeting rather than on what you are planning to say. You have already practiced so don't psyche yourself out! If you are nervous when you get up to speak, you do not have to start immediately. Look at your notes and take a couple deep breathes before beginning.

### Make eye contact

As you are speaking be sure to look up from your speech as often as possible to make eye contact with members of the audience. Eye contact builds trust between a speaker and the audience.



### Speak clearly and slowly

If you are nervous you may speak more quickly than normal which may cause you to stumble or confuse your audience. Make an effort to noticeably slow your speech and use short sentences. This will make you easier to understand and may also help calm your nerves. Also, drink plenty of water before you speak so that your mouth does not dry out.

### Pause for emphasis

When you make an important point, pause for a moment to let the audience absorb what you've said.

### Tell the truth

If a legislator asks you a question that you do not know how to answer DO NOT make something up. Instead say that you do not know but will be sure to follow up by finding and providing the answer for their records after the meeting.

### Listen

Before and after you have testified, be sure to pay attention to what the opposition is saying! Take notes on any unfamiliar or erroneous points they make so that you can look into those arguments later.