



Testimony 101

Written or oral testimony is a statement prepared for a local, state, or federal hearing that informs decision-making on an issue.

Who can testify?



Federal level:

- Witnesses are generally invited to provide oral testimony to congressional committees; occasionally a committee chair will allow witnesses to testify at their own request.
- In general, written testimony is welcomed by committees (check committee websites for details and instructions).



State and local level: In general, the public can provide oral testimony (no invitation needed), as well as written testimony. Check local and state committee websites for details and instructions.

Before you provide oral testimony



- **Expect an official written invitation** and paperwork to complete from the congressional committee.
- **Verify hearing details** including date, time, and location.



- **Learn the rules and guidelines of the entity you plan to testify before**, including:
 - Time limits of oral testimony (usually 3-5 minutes).
 - Submitting electronic or paper copies of testimony.
 - Deadlines for written submissions.
 - Letting the committee clerk know if you need accommodations.



- **If testifying about a specific bill or regulation, read it and its analyses**; understand the pro and con arguments.
- **Familiarize yourself with the committee members** to see if any have a connection to your specific issue, U-M, your district, etc. in order to anticipate questions and frame your remarks.



- **Consider watching a recording of a previous committee hearing**, so you know what to expect.



Connect with U-M Government Relations or IHPI for additional guidance

Writing your testimony



- **Start with a title page** that includes the hearing title, committee, date, your name.
- **Written testimony page length requirements vary by committee** (aim for 4-6 pages/ maximum 10), so check the committee website to confirm before writing.



- **Craft an introduction:**
 - Start with a sentence thanking the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony.
 - Briefly introduce yourself including your title and expertise.
 - Consider including a disclaimer that you are testifying on behalf of yourself and not the university (unless you are an official U-M witness).



- **Include brief background and context about the issue.**
- **Focus your oral remarks on a few main takeaways** relevant to the needs of the committee.



- **Highlight your and other research findings**, relevant facts, personal stories, policy experiences in other states, etc.



- **Avoid jargon, spell out acronyms, define specialty terms.**
- **End with a summary statement about policy options** and solutions, potential impact on populations, public health, and/or cost savings. Thank the committee for the opportunity to speak.
- **If you plan to testify in person, you may want to draft short oral remarks pulled from your written testimony** and ask to place your longer testimony in the official record. Oral remarks are often capped at five minutes which is approximately 750 words in length.

Examples of testimony

- **WATCH & READ:** Nurse scientist Sue Anne Bell testified before the U.S. Senate Aging Committee about inclusive disaster management.
- **WATCH & READ:** Pediatrician Kao-Ping Chua testified before the U.S. House Energy & Commerce Committee about "orphan drug" loopholes.
- **READ:** The Michigan Primary Care Association testified before the Michigan Senate Health Policy Committee about updates to HIV testing and treatment policies.
- **READ:** The American Enterprise Institute testified before the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions Committee on the Lower Health Care Costs Act.



Sue Anne Bell, Ph.D., M.S.N.



Kao-Ping Chua, M.D., Ph.D.

Proud of your testimony? Hearings are often webcast (you can invite friends and family to watch if providing oral testimony).

Tips for oral testimony



- **At hearings, it is ok to read your oral remarks to ensure you don't forget important points.** Try to make eye contact though.
- **Try to ignore distractions during the hearing** (committee members come and go, staff talk to members, etc.).
- **Practice, practice, practice.**

Answering questions in a hearing



- **Your responses should be succinct** and answer the question clearly.
- **Use facts, evidence, and study findings.**
- **Avoid emotional speeches or inflammatory language;** put personal politics aside and avoid political comments.
- **Do not interrupt a policymaker.**
- **If you are asked a question you don't understand or are unsure how to answer, consider these replies:**
 - "Would you please repeat the question?"
 - "That question is beyond my expertise."
 - "I'm sorry, I don't know the answer to that question but would be happy to follow up with you after the hearing."

Final checklist for your testimony

- ✓ Does it flow clearly?
- ✓ Is the content appropriate for the audience(s)?
- ✓ Are facts, data, analysis, and/or stories presented effectively?
- ✓ Is the language clear, concise and free of politics?
- ✓ Is the content jargon-free, with acronyms defined?
- ✓ Did I double check for spelling and grammatical errors?
- ✓ Did I ask someone outside of my area of expertise to read the testimony to see if they understood what I am trying to convey?
- ✓ Did I practice to ensure that my oral testimony fits within the given time limits?

