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, and 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.

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?

For more IHPI policy resources, visit IHPI.UMICH.EDU/POLICY-ENGAGEMENT

Questions? Contact Eileen Kostanecki at ekostan@umich.edu

February 2022