

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, maintain order and decorum, 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 other people seeing the hearing. Placards and posters are not permitted. They block peoples' view, and 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. Talking on cellular phones is prohibited.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Public hearings are televised live on the District of Columbia Council Channel, Channel 13 or 18. You can also watch Council proceedings on our website. Copies of legislation and current status information may be obtained from the Council's Legislative Information Management System (LIMS). You can also request information by contacting the Legislative Services Division at **202-724-8050** or by visiting Room 10. For hearing updates, check the Hearing Management System, the calendar on the Council's website, or call **202-724-8000**.

www.dccouncil.gov

COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

AN EASY GUIDE TO TESTIFYING BEFORE THE COUNCIL

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

(202) 724-8000

www.dccouncil.gov



Legislative Information Management System
<https://lims.dccouncil.gov/>

Hearing Management System
lims.dccouncil.gov/hearings

dccouncil.gov

**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 you taking the time to share your views with us. We believe public participation is critical, whether we are considering a new law, examining government performance, or adopting the annual budget. An engaged citizenry and active advocacy community make our government stronger.

We deliberately build in opportunities for the public to participate throughout the legislative process: from a bill's introduction to its review by a committee, through a final vote by the Council. A public hearing is a key part of our process that guarantees you can communicate your views 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 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 critical part of this process is the solicitation of community input at a public hearing. Hearings are when we—the Council—invite residents, community groups, government agencies, and others to share their thoughts on a bill. At a hearing, we want to know: what parts of a bill work for you and the people you care about? What parts should we revisit and why? What is missing? We use your testimony to improve bills. Our goal is to put forward the best bill possible by the time we all vote.

Anyone can sign up to testify—just be mindful of the published rules, and the deadline to register. Each person who complies with the committee's requirements will be given an opportunity to testify.

Council committees will encourage residents to use our online Hearing Management System (HMS) to sign up to testify at hearings, submit their testimony, and review lists of fellow witnesses who will also be testifying. Most committees offer virtual or in-person testimony.

When your name is called, you will likely have three minutes to speak. You should greet the chair and the members, introduce yourself, say if you are testifying on behalf of an 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 ... " This is your opportunity to make your views known and have them incorporated into the public record.

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WHAT TO EXPECT AT A PUBLIC HEARING

The committee chair opens the hearing, explains the purpose of the proceeding, provides the ground rules, and usually makes an opening statement. Any other councilmembers present, including those who co-introduced the bill, may also make brief statements. Generally, witness testimony will be heard in the order of speakers listed on the agenda or the final witness list, which is generally available in the Hearing Management System (HMS) within 24 hours of the hearing. A committee chair may hear from government officials first (to provide a status report to the public) or last (so that they may respond to public comments they heard during public testimony). A committee chair may also have similar organizations testify together.

Witnesses often use their speaking time to summarize the more extensive written testimony they submit for the record. Councilmembers may question some witnesses to elicit more information. Be specific and to the point--confine your remarks to the question under discussion. Please keep in mind that many other citizens have likely signed up to testify. If asked to summarize your testimony, please comply with the 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 American Sign Language interpreters can be provided if you contact the committee at least five business days in advance of the hearing. Service animals will be admitted to hearing rooms. The Council Chamber is equipped with an FM assistive hearing system, other hearing rooms have audio induction loop technology. Please notify the committee at least one business day in advance if these technologies are needed. Closed captioning is available in all hearing rooms. The John A. Wilson Building is equipped with handicapped accessible doors.