

Testifying Before Legislative Committees

A How-To Guide for Citizens Wanting to Participate in the Process

Idaho has an open legislative process. All committee action on bills and amendments is conducted in open sessions and you may attend any or all of these meetings.

Once a bill has been introduced, it is assigned to a committee for study and consideration. The committee chairman determines when a bill is to be scheduled for a hearing. Public testimony is permitted at most meetings.

Legislative committee meetings are generally informal, but it is important that you follow the guidelines and protocol listed below:

Before the Committee Meeting

- Find out when and where your bill(s) will be heard. You may do so by checking with Senate and House committee staff and by looking on the Internet for daily committee agendas when the Legislature is in session.
- Plan your testimony. You will be more effective getting your message across if you have prepared your testimony in writing for distribution to committee members. You can then orally summarize your remarks to conserve time.

At the Committee Meeting

- Be on time. Find out when and where the meeting is to be held -- check agendas.
- Be sure to sign your name when you arrive and indicate whether you intend to testify. Sign-up sheets are available at all meetings.
- Wait your turn. The Chairman will announce when a particular bill is coming before the committee for discussion. The bill's sponsor is usually the first to speak. After his testimony, the Chairman then may ask for testimony from proponents and opponents.
- **All** testimony and **all** committee discussion **must** be addressed through the Chairman.
- Begin your testimony by addressing the Chairman and committee members. State your name, address, and why you are there. For example: "Mr. (or Madam) Chairman, members of the Committee,

my name is Pat Q. Public and I'm from Emmett. I am/am not in favor of this bill because...."

- Be courteous and brief in your language and address. Try not to repeat testimony offered by previous witnesses. Be prepared to answer questions. Respond to the questions as best you can. You need not be embarrassed if you do not have a specific answer.
- Do not be nervous as there is no right or wrong way to testify. Legislators are your friends and neighbors elected to represent you - **they want to hear what you have to say.**
- Demonstrations, applause, or addressing committee members or other witnesses in the audience are prohibited.
- Do not be offended if legislators come and go during a meeting. They have other commitments, including the need at times to present information in other meetings occurring simultaneously.

After You Testify

- Do not expect immediate committee action. The bill may be held until another day. You are welcome to stay after the discussion on your bill and listen until the end of the committee meeting.
- If the vote on your bill is postponed, and the Chairman does not announce a date for further consideration, check back with committee staff or the Information Center about future scheduling.

Remember . . .

- Legislators want to hear what you have to say. Your input is important to them and they appreciate your interest in Idaho's political process.

This information has been provided by:

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