



**ACLU**

AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION  
of RHODE ISLAND

# 10 Tips for Testifying Before a Legislative Committee

**1. Provide written testimony.** Legislators hear a lot of testimony, and not every legislator will be in the room for the entire hearing. Written testimony will ensure you get to say everything you want, and that legislators will remember your statement later.

**2. Practice your elevator pitch.** The length of your testimony is at the discretion of the committee chair. Some will let you speak without limit; others, especially if the hearing is well attended, will limit your time. Practice your testimony with a two-minute limit, so that you can get your important points across. Even if you have unlimited time, short, strong points will stay with legislators more than long, detailed testimony.

**3. Don't repeat what others have said.** Once a point has been made, there's often little benefit in making it again. Keep your points fresh and people will pay more attention.

**4. Keep it local.** Legislators are most interested in how the issue affects their constituents. Whenever possible, link your testimony back to yourself, your neighbors, or your community.

**5. Sign up before the hearing.** Sign-up sheets will be available in the hearing room before the hearing. If you can't find the sign-up sheets, or you get to the hearing late, see the committee clerk.

**6. Make sure your microphone is on, thank the chair, and introduce yourself.** Some hearing rooms have microphones with red buttons; make sure the button is up so your voice can be recorded. Introduce yourself to the committee, so they know who you are and why you're there.

**7. Remain calm and professional.** Your passion should fuel your testimony, but try to avoid being or making others defensive. Hearings can get heated, but they aren't debates. Avoid arguing with legislators, and never engage in personal attacks against anyone.

**8. Speak plainly.** You may have expertise, but most others in the room won't. Speak in easy-to-understand terms, and try to avoid jargon.

**9. If you don't know the answer, say so.** Nobody has all the answers at their fingertips. If you are asked a question and don't have the answer, be honest. Use that as an opportunity to follow up with your legislators later with the answer to their question, and a reminder of your opinion. Never claim a fact you aren't certain of.

**10. Take a deep breath, and be confident.** Everybody was a beginner once, and you'll do fine.