

Testimony 101: Texas Style

A Guide to Testifying at Texas Legislative Hearings

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BRIEF OVERVIEW: How the Legislature Works

The Texas Legislature is a bicameral legislature that meets regularly in each odd-numbered year or when called into a special session by the governor. There are 150 members of the Texas House of Representatives and 31 members of the Texas Senate.

The Legislature works through a committee process to pass legislation. Committee members are selected by the presiding officer of each chamber – the Speaker of the House and the Lieutenant Governor, who oversees the Senate.

Once a legislator files a bill, it is sent to the appropriate committee for a hearing. The committee assignment is determined by the subject matter of the bill. Each committee holds hearings on its assigned bills. Under the Open Meetings Act, legislative committees must post the issues and/or proposed bills they intend to discuss at least five days prior to a hearing.

During a special session, committees must post hearing notices at least 24 hours prior to a hearing. When hearings are called from the floor of either the House or Senate, a committee must give notice at least two hours before a hearing.

Once the committee hearing has been scheduled, the legislators on the committee may request that certain witnesses testify on a bill or an issue under consideration.

Additionally, the committee allocates time during the hearing for the public to provide testimony. In most cases, school board members will testify during the public testimony portion of the hearing. Since legislative committee meetings and state agency hearings are open meetings, all proceedings and testimony are public record, and are documented.

Additionally, committee hearings are generally broadcast via the Internet. For a detailed description of the legislative process, visit:

<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/capitol/legproc/summary.htm>

What Happens During a Committee Hearing?

Citizen activists may wish to testify before a legislative committee for a proposed bill they support or oppose. There are some procedures, requirements, and expected etiquette you will need to know to effectively represent your cause.

Once you arrive at a committee hearing to testify, you will be required to sign a witness affirmation form stating:

- **Your NAME;**
- **The organization you are representing; (*You may present yourself as a concerned citizen.*)**
- **Your contact information;**
- **The bill or issue on which you are testifying; and,**
- **Whether you SUPPORT, OPPOSE or wish to remain NEUTRAL on that bill or issue.**

When the hearing begins, the committee chair will announce the bill number being considered and will then begin calling witnesses who have signed up to testify on the bill. When you are called up to testify, it is important to keep three things in mind:

- **Always begin by thanking the committee;**
- **Limit your comments to between three to five minutes, or the time limit imposed by the chair; and,**
- **Be ready to answer questions.**

Bring several copies of your testimony, as **it is customary to provide hard copies of your testimony for each member of the committee.**

Once testimony has been heard on a bill:

- The committee may vote on the bill, amend it, delay it for further discussion, or ask for more information.
- Bills delayed for discussion or voted down may reappear as another bill or an amendment to another bill, so it is advisable to monitor TASB communications for updates on legislative and regulatory activities.

By testifying on an issue, you are making a valuable contribution to the creation of the policies that govern Texas' public schools.

Tips for Preparing Testimony

As you develop your testimony, keep these important points in mind:

- The point of your testimony is to tell your local story.
- Develop a concise message:
- Focus on three or four message points you want to emphasize.
 - **Prioritize** those points and deliver the most important ones first in case there is not enough time to deliver all of them.
 - A template for developing your testimony is attached as an Appendix to this document.
- **Focus on local impact** – Illustrate your message points with data, statistics, or a brief anecdote about how the proposed bill/issue will affect your district.
- **Get the facts straight** – Be as accurate as possible and give credit to the source of information to increase your credibility and protect yourself if the details turn out to be incorrect.
- **Know the legislators' areas of interest** – Your testimony will be most persuasive if it addresses the issues that are most important to the committee members.
- **Other supporters of the proposed bill who are experienced witnesses should be able to**
 - Provide you with biographical information about each committee member and
 - Help you identify the bills the member has authored.

Tips for Testifying

As you prepare to testify, keep these tips in mind:

- **Build rapport** – Acknowledge the committee members and thank them for allowing you to testify. **Maintain good eye contact with and address your comments directly to the members.**
- **Summarize your key points** – Avoid reading written testimony.
 - Simply summarize the key points verbally and
 - **PROVIDE COPIES OF WRITTEN TESTIMONY TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE, STAFF, NEWS MEDIA, AND OTHER OBSERVERS.**
 - **Include charts and/or infographics that make a visual impact.**
- Avoid repetition: Legislators often hear much boring, repetitious testimony, so make yours memorable. Orally omit points already hammered home, though you should leave them in your written testimony if you choose to turn one in.
- Be sincere. Be yourself.
- Don't become too emotional or dramatic.
- **Waive the opportunity to speak if several others have already said what you wanted to say, but**
- **MAKE SURE YOU REMEMBER TO DISTRIBUTE WRITTEN COPIES OF YOUR TESTIMONY!**
- Be honest and helpful.
- **Often, the committee members will ask questions of people who testify. Answer questions as honestly as you can.**
 - If you don't know the answer, admit that you don't know.
 - Afterwards, if you find another witness who supports your views on the issue who knows the answer, ask them if they would please follow up with the legislator who asked the question and/or the entire committee after the hearing.
- Avoid confrontation – If a member of the committee asks a hostile question, diffuse the hostility by remaining poised. Even if the committee seems opposed to your perspective, your testimony may earn their respect, educate those attending the hearing, and/or at least prove that opposition exists.
- **Dress conservatively** – You do not want to distract legislators from listening to your message. **Business attire is appropriate.**

Testimony Outline

The following template is provided as a guideline. As you develop your testimony, focus on how the proposed legislation will impact your area, **as supported by facts and anecdotes.**

Remember to prioritize your message points so that you state your most important points first.

Remember to stay within the time requirements. If none are given, 3-5 minutes at the most.

Good (morning/afternoon/evening. My name is John Doe, and I am representing Myself &/or the Someplace-in-Texas Conservative Group. I am testifying in (support of/opposition to) HB/SB # ____ because:

- I. Message 1: The legislation would change current law (how) and would have a positive/negative impact on my district and districts across Texas.
 - a. Data showing impact on/cost to your school district
 - b. Story illustrating impact on your school district

- II. Message 2: The change in the law would also (help/hurt my district) by...
 - a. Data showing impact on/cost to your school district
 - b. Story illustrating impact on your school district

- III. Message 3: An alternative approach that would be better for Texas school districts would be to...

Parking & Getting around the Capitol

Logistics of the Capitol and Other State Agencies

The **Capitol** is located at the intersection of **Congress Avenue and 11th Street in Austin**.

The entire complex covers several city blocks, and the building is accessible from several entrances.

PARKING closest to the Capitol is available in the [State Visitor Parking Garage at San Jacinto and 12th Streets](#) for a minimal charge (max. \$10.00/day).

The area around the Capitol is relatively safe, even late at night.

Useful maps of the Capitol and surrounding buildings are available on the State Preservation Board's website:

<http://www.tspb.state.tx.us/SPB/Plan/FloorPlan/FlorPlan.htm> .

Committees usually meet in hearing rooms located in the Capitol Extension (the underground portion of the Capitol). At times, committees will hold hearings on the Senate chamber floor or in other rooms in the Capitol. It is important to contact the committee clerk, or legislative staff you've been working with on the morning of the hearing to verify its location.

A GREAT RESOURCE is the [Texas Legislature Online website](#), (<http://www.legis.state.tx.us/MnuCommittees.aspx>) which provides the schedule and location of committee meetings. Useful Links from the TLO homepage can be found in Appendix B.

FINDING YOUR WAY in the CAPITOL BUILDING

Rooms in the Capitol Extension are designated with the letter “E” indicating that the room is in the Capitol Extension, followed by the room number (e.g. E1.123, E2.123).

The first number following the “E” indicates which floor of the extension the room is on.

- A room number that begins with “2” means the room is on the second floor of the extension (e.g. E2.123), while
- A room number starting with “1” means that it is on the lower, first floor (e.g. 1.123).

In the main Capitol building, rooms are denoted with an “E, S, W,” or “N” to designate whether the room is on the east, south, west, or north side of the building, followed by the floor and room number: (e.g. **NG.1 – north wing, ground floor, room 1; W2.5 – west wing, second floor, room 5**)

Useful Links from TLO homepage <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/Home.aspx>

How Do I?

- [Find list of filed bills?](#)
- [Follow the status of a bill?](#)
- [Contact my legislator?](#)
- [Find how a legislator voted?](#)
- [Find when hearings are scheduled?](#)
- [View the text of a bill?](#)
- [Testify at a House committee hearing?](#)

My TLO

- [Track Legislation With Bill Lists](#)
- [Receive Bill and Meeting Alerts](#)
- [Subscribe to RSS Feeds !\[\]\(52f8f8b98f8396d4f92059ff19d41332_img.jpg\)](#)
- [View Content on Mobile Device](#)
- [Saved Bill, Text, Amendment Searches](#)

Access Mobile Version of TLO

Access a [mobile version](#) of TLO, Who Represents Me, and DistrictViewer on an iPhone, iPad, or other mobile device. From the mobile device browser, enter www.txlegis.com. NOTE: Some applications or features within an application may not be accessible on all mobile devices.

Legislative Activity

- Video Broadcasts: [House](#) | [Senate](#)
- Today's Calendars: [House](#) | [Senate](#) | [All](#)
- Today's Meetings: [House](#) | [Senate](#) | [All](#)
- Today's Filed Bills: [House](#) | [Senate](#) | [All](#)
- Today's Votes: [House](#) | [Senate](#)

Legislative Process

- [How a Bill Becomes Law](#)
- [How to Follow A Bill](#)
- [Dates of Interest](#) | [Glossary](#)
- [End of Session Deadlines](#)

Committee Meetings: [Senate](#) | [House](#)

Visitor Info: [Texas Capitol Info](#) | [Maps](#) | [Visitor Parking](#)

[Tours](#) | [Cafeteria](#) | [Gift Shop](#)

Off Capitol Grounds State Agencies

Most state agencies are located in state office buildings within walking distance of the Capitol. Others are located in other parts of Austin.

Parking for state agencies: is also available at the **State Visitor Parking Garage** or at a street parking meter, **so remember to bring quarters.**

State Office Building Security

At any state office building, security guards may require you to show picture identification and the contents of your belongings (i.e., your purse or briefcase) upon entering the building. Be prepared for increased security measures during the legislative session or after any national security alert.

Restaurants Near the Capitol

- **The State Capitol has a cafeteria, the Capitol Grill, located in the Capitol Extension, Room E1.002.**
Open to the public Monday – Friday, 7:30 am – 5:00 pm.
- **The Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum**, which is a few blocks north of the Capitol, has The Story of Texas Cafe, located on the museum's second floor. The cafe is open Monday –Saturday, 10:00 am – 5:00 pm & Sunday, 12 noon – 5:00 pm.

There are also several restaurants on Congress within walking distance of the Capitol:

- **Texas Chili Parlor**, 1409 Lavaca St. (15th & Lavaca St., about 0.4 mi. W of the Capitol)
- **Brick Oven Pizza**, 1209 Red River St. (12th and Red River St., about 0.6 mi. E of the Capitol)
- **Serrano's Café and Cantina**, 1111 Red River St. (near 11th & Red River Street, about 0.7 mi. E of the Capitol)
- **Hickory Street Bar and Grille**, 800 Congress Ave. (corner of 8th & Congress Ave., about 0.6 mi. S of the Capitol)
- **The Roaring Fork**, 701 Congress Ave. (corner of 7th and Congress Ave., about 0.6 miles south of the Capitol)

Hotels Close to the Capitol

There are many Austin hotels located downtown, some within walking distance of the Capitol. These include:

- Sheraton Austin Hotel, 701 East 11th Street, (512) 478-1111
- The Driskill Hotel, 604 Brazos Street, (512) 474-5911
- Doubletree Guest Suites, 303 West 15th Street, (512) 478-7000
- La Quinta Inn, 300 East 11th Street, (512) 476-1166
- Omni Austin Hotel, 700 San Jacinto Street, (512) 476-3700
- Hyatt Regency Austin, 208 Barton Springs Road, (512) 477-1234
- Wyndham Gardens Austin, 3401 South IH-35, (512) 448-2444



The End