

How to Testify to a Committee During a Pandemic



Members of the public will be able to participate in the legislative process in several ways, though the Capitol will remain closed to the public during the first half of Maine's 130th Legislative session due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Maine Legislature streams all hearings, contains committee meeting materials and offers ability for people to submit written testimony:

Maine Legislature's Testimony Submission Form: <https://www.mainelegislature.org/testimony/>

Instructions will be forthcoming on how members of the public may participate in Committee hearings virtually. MHCA will provide direction once it is available. See <http://legislature.maine.gov/> for direct links to Committee audio and video (YouTube).

In preparation for providing virtual testimony, please review the following suggestions:

Know Your Audience

- Committee members are "citizen legislators," and they want to hear your comments.
- Be respectful of committee members as well as other people who come to testify.
- Do not scold or insult members or other witnesses, or accuse members of causing your issue. This may alienate members from your cause.

Know the Issue

- Draw from your own knowledge and experience.
- Support personal opinions with as many facts as possible.
- Be knowledgeable of the "other side of the story." You may be asked to discuss how and why your opinion differs from others.

Be Familiar with the Committee Process

- Be sure of the meeting time.
- Agendas are posted online. Check the agenda to make sure the bill you are interested in has not been removed or rescheduled.
- Bills are not always heard in the order in which they appear on the agenda.
- Committee hearings provide the opportunity for legislators to hear from members of the public. There is usually time for Q&A with witnesses.
- Committee work sessions provide the opportunity for legislators to deliberate, debate, discuss bills among themselves. The Committee may invite members of the public to address them during a work session but this usually occurs on a limited basis.

Presenting Your Written Testimony

- Testimony may be submitted as soon as the bill is scheduled for public hearing. At a minimum, email your written testimony and any materials (reports, handouts, presentations) at least 24 hours in advance so it can be posted electronically to Maine's legislative site for the members and public to view.
- Testimony received after the day of the public hearing will be distributed to committee members and staff, but it will not be published online. Testimony will be published as soon as possible after the day of the hearing.
- Please include your name and organization or town of residence on any documents.
- When virtually presenting, address members formally (e.g., Senator Jones, Representative Brown). Respond to questions through the chair (e.g., 'Chair Jones and members of the committee...').
- State your name, city or county, and any other affiliation for the record, even if you've already been introduced or called upon by name.
- Clearly state whether you support or oppose the bill and briefly explain your reason.
- If you submitted written testimony, do not read it word-for-word to members. Make an outline and summarize the main points of the testimony.
- Keep in mind that many people testifying or a busy agenda may require you to limit your testimony to three minutes. Many times, Committee Chairs will remind you when you are getting close to the time limit and may ask you to wrap up or summarize your testimony quickly. Do not be insulted; this is commonplace to keep the process moving.
- When finished, thank the members and offer to answer any questions.
- Members realize that the process may be intimidating; they do not expect perfect presentations.
- Testifying as a group: Select a few people to cover different topics so the testimony is not repetitive. Address the problem, possible solutions, and your group's solution. Check with MHCA staff to determine how much time will be allotted for testimony on the bill and how best to distribute the testimony.
- Verbal testimony and written materials are public records available to the public on the Internet. Use discretion on what personal information to include.