

A Guide for Reaching State Legislators and Testifying at Hearings

Your elected state legislators want to know what you think of proposed legislation before they vote on it. You can telephone them or write them letters to express your views. Another effective way of getting your point across is speaking at a public hearing. Here's how:

GETTING READY

It will help to know the number of the bill you're interested in. To find out, call the bill status information room at (860) 240-0555, or call one of the toll-free numbers listed below and ask to be transferred to the Information Room.

The Connecticut General Assembly's internet site (www.cga.ct.gov) will allow you to retrieve the bill status information on the bill you are interested in, including current text, up-to-date actions on the bill, introducer, statement of purpose and co-sponsors.

Plan your remarks so your viewpoint and reasoning will be clear. It may help you to write them out completely. There is no need to provide copies, but if you want to leave written testimony, it's helpful to make enough copies for all members of the committee holding the hearing, with about 10 extras for staff and files. Committee staff cannot make these copies for you. Turn in written testimony before the hearing begins so committee staff can distribute it systematically.

FINDING THE HEARING ROOM

Most hearings are held in the Legislative Office Building (LOB), though some are in the Capitol. TV monitors at LOB and Capitol entrances show the locations. A daily bulletin also gives this information and lists all bills scheduled for hearing. You can get a bulletin in the LOB's ground floor bill room during regular sessions or on the General Assembly's internet site (www.cga.ct.gov).

SIGNING UP

Pick up a copy of the bill from the rack outside the hearing room.

WHEN YOU COME TO TESTIFY

Read the legislative bulletin for the particular information on the sign-up process, for that day. The sign up sheet has space to print your name legibly, the bill(s) you are speaking on, and sometimes, whether you are for or against the bill. Sign up sheets are usually in place one hour before the hearing.

After signing up, you may be seated in the hearing room, or look around the building until the hearing begins. It is a good idea to read the bill before you speak, to be sure you understand it.

HEARING PROCEDURES

Speaking Order: One of the committee's co-chairpersons will preside over the hearing, setting rules that seem fair for the circumstances and calling speakers from the signup sheets. At many, but not all hearings, the first hour is reserved for legislators and agency heads or invited guests. Remaining speakers are usually called in the order in which their names appear on the signup sheet, although some chairpersons alternate between supporters and opponents of a bill. Chairpersons often ask large groups to appoint a single spokesperson. Some committees hear all testimony on one bill before proceeding to the next, following the agenda printed in the bulletin.

Comings and Goings: Some hearings last for several hours. Legislators may leave and reenter the room if they are scheduled for more than one hearing or meeting. But all testimony is recorded so they can read it later.

Decorum: A hearing is an important step in the process of making law, so it is a formal occasion. Please give your courteous attention to other speakers, regardless of their views. Don't applaud or indicate pleasure or displeasure with anyone's remarks.

YOUR TURN AT THE MICROPHONE

When you are called, sit at the speaker's desk. You may begin with "Madam Chair, Mr. Chairman" (as appropriate) "and members of the committee." Introduce yourself very distinctly so the transcriber can understand, and mention your town and the number and title of the bill you'll be speaking on. In addition, most hearings and meetings are covered by Connecticut Network (CT-N) for broadcast over local cable access stations.

Indicate right away whether you support the bill, oppose it, or are offering suggestions to improve it. Then explain your reasoning. Follow this procedure for each bill you discuss.

Keep your remarks short; 3-5 minutes is usually enough, but be sure not to exceed any announced time limits. If other speakers have already made your point, you can say that you agree with, or want to associate yourself with the remarks of one or more previous speakers. Your views and your name will then be clearly on record.

When you finish, remain at the microphone for a moment, in case committee members want to ask questions. Then return to your seat or leave the hearing, as you wish.

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

You can help committee staff plan for comfortable, efficient hearings if you notify them in advance when you intend to bring an unusually large group or a large number of people requiring wheelchair space, or if you need projection equipment. The staff can provide headsets for hearing-impaired people without advance notice.

TO CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATOR

- The blue pages of the telephone directory (available for free and found in the League of Women Voters Information Service areas of the LOB and the Capitol) list the home or business numbers of your state representative and senator. You will find them under "Connecticut, State of. State Legislators."
- The General Assembly maintains several toll-free numbers through which you may be transferred to a legislator or to the bill status information room.

House Democrats 1-800-842-8267

House Democratic Leadership 1-800-842-1902

House Republicans 1-800-842-8270

House Republican Leadership 1-800-842-1423

Senate Democrats 1-800-842-1420

Senate Republicans 1-800-842-1421

- To reach a committee office, obtain the number from the League of Women Voters Capitol Information Service (860-240-0222) or ask to be transferred from a toll-free number.
- If you use a TDD (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf), you can call these numbers:

House Democrats (860) 240-0160

House Republicans (860) 240-0161

Senate Democrats (860) 240-0162

Senate Republicans (860) 240-0163

Human Services Committee (860) 240-0164

- The senator or representative can also be contacted via email from the appropriate caucus website:

House of Representatives <http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/House.asp>

Senate <http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/Senate.asp>

TO FOLLOW A BILL

During the legislative session, the bill status information room (860-240-0555) can tell you how far a bill has progressed through the legislative process. The Connecticut State Library can provide this information during and between sessions (860-757-6550). You may dial either of these numbers or be transferred from one of the toll-free numbers.

Bill status information is also available on the General Assembly's internet site (www.cga.ct.gov).