

TESTIFYING AT HEARINGS

Lawmakers hold hearings to gather information on issues that are the subject of legislation or proposed regulations. Testifying at a hearing allows you to directly communicate with lawmakers about how the proposal will affect your job as a superintendent and the golf course management industry.

TESTIFYING BEFORE STATE OR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

At the state and local levels, anyone can usually testify and an invitation from the committee is not necessary. Advance notice of your plan to testify may be necessary, or you may only need to sign up at the beginning of the hearing. Contact the committee staff in advance to find out how it works for their hearings.

TESTIFYING BEFORE CONGRESS

In Congress, an invitation to testify is necessary. Invitations can be arranged through the committee staff, with the help of the bill sponsor or through your own member of Congress. Not all requests for invitations are granted. Sometimes invitations are offered first-come, first-served on a certain day, and the agenda fills rapidly.

The length of your written testimony (for the record) can be detailed, but use only attention-getting excerpts for your oral presentation, which should be brief, and to the point.

Many committees have their own requirements for written testimony, including double-spaced pages, legal sized paper, and a standard number of copies for committee use. Generally, there are no restrictions on the length of written testimony submitted for the official hearing record.

DELIVERING TESTIMONY

The person who delivers the testimony is just as important as what is said. Be sure to select someone who is a good public speaker, is knowledgeable on the issue, is a leader in your organization and if possible, is from the same state or district as a member on the committee.

If you are chosen to present testimony you should do as much advance preparation as possible—especially if you are not completely comfortable with public speaking. Reading a book or article on public speaking is a good idea, and practice your testimony in front of your chapter members or colleagues.

During your testimony explain your position clearly by speaking naturally and following an outline. Avoid reading your testimony if possible. Visual aids and specific examples are also very effective in getting your message across.

TIPS FOR PRESENTING EFFECTIVE TESTIMONY

By Timothy Haake, Esq., Haake & Associates

BEFORE THE HEARING

DO YOUR HOMEWORK. Adequate preparation requires seeking answers to these four questions:

- 1) What has our association said before on this subject?
- 2) What legislators sit on the committee?
- 3) What is the committee hoping to get from this hearing?
- 4) What do we hope to get from this hearing?

PREPARE YOUR STATEMENT FOR THE OFFICIAL HEARING RECORD. Most witnesses will use a prepared text when testifying before a legislative committee. Many witnesses find it beneficial to think of this prepared statement as having two forms:

- 1) The statement submitted for the official hearing record; and
- 2) The statement from which the witness actually reads aloud.

“Analyze your audience in terms of how they view the subject. Is there common ground shared by them and you on which you can build an appealing argument?”

CAREFULLY CONSIDER HOW BEST TO WRITE YOUR “READ VERSION.” Its function is not only to communicate but also to persuade. Analyze your audience in terms of how they view the subject. Is there common ground shared by them and you on which you can build an appealing argument? While some may be fixed in their opposition, is there a middle-ground approach that can work to persuade others? What opposing points should you be prepared to rebut?

ADHERE TO THE COMMITTEE’S GUIDELINES FOR WRITTEN TESTIMONY. Many committees have their own requirements for written testimony, including double-spacing, legal sized paper, and a standard number of copies for committee use. Generally, there are no restrictions on the length of written testimony submitted for the official hearing record.

PRACTICE READING YOUR TESTIMONY ALOUD. Time yourself, and listen carefully. It is helpful to have an audience, either a colleague or spouse, to provide constructive comments on your presentation.

CONSIDER “PLANTING” QUESTIONS WITH FRIENDLY COMMITTEE MEMBERS. Draft several questions and float them to any receptive committee members. This can help you get your point across and will ensure that you are prepared for possible questions.

TIPS FOR PRESENTING EFFECTIVE TESTIMONY

DURING THE HEARING

KEEP YOUR “READ VERSION” BRIEF. Summarize what is in the official record version, emphasizing only the important points. You should be able to read it aloud in no more than five minutes. Avoid abbreviations, undefined acronyms, and any other industry-specific technical jargon. It is unlikely that everyone present will understand them.

ADHERE STRICTLY TO ANY TIME LIMITS IMPOSED BY THE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN. Staying within limits demonstrates preparedness and fosters a favorable environment.

DON'T ANSWER A QUESTION UNLESS YOU KNOW THE ANSWER. Never guess at an answer or tell a legislator what you think he or she wants to hear. Instead, tell the legislator (or committee) you will be happy to get information from your association and send it as soon as possible. Ask for the name of a staff person you can contact.

AFTER THE HEARING

BE SURE TO FOLLOW UP WITH THE COMMITTEE. After the hearing, the committee may send you a transcript of your remarks. This is not required, but is a normal courtesy accorded to witnesses. It gives you the opportunity to edit and correct your grammar and improper phrasing.

It is not an opportunity to change the substance of any answer, even if, on reflection or review, you conclude that you were in error. If you wish to change an answer, write a letter to the chairman indicating where you were mistaken, and give the correct information. Observe the committee's deadline in returning your transcript.

ALWAYS LET YOUR ASSOCIATION MEMBERS AND STAFF KNOW HOW YOUR TESTIMONY WENT. Was a particular committee member interested in or responsive to your positions? Did he or she vow to help you achieve your goals or offer any suggestions?

Timothy Haake, Esq., Haake & Associates Washington, D.C., represents several associations before Congress. This article is excerpted and reprinted with permission of the American Society of Association Executives, 1575 I St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005-1168; © 1995-96, (202) 626-2723; www.asaenet.org.