

US EPA Public Hearings: *How to Testify*

Why is Testifying Important?

Verbal testimony has an emotional impact. In many cases, lawmakers have no way of knowing how policy directly helps or hurts a community. Personal testimony introduces a first-hand account of how laws affect the average American and offers citizens the opportunity to voice their support or uncertainty about the policies that affect them, their families or their communities. Personal testimony can have a real and profound impact on the policies and regulations proposed and implemented by state or federal legislatures.

How Do YOU Prepare for Your Testimony?

Time Limit is 5 Minutes

- Keep your testimony brief and to the point--not more than five minutes, preferably less. Note that your written testimony can go into greater detail.
- Write down your comments and practice in front of a mirror or family and friends. You should also time yourself while rehearsing. This ensures that you are comfortable and familiar with what you want to say and that you won't exceed the allotted time.

Make it Personal

- Speak from the heart. Tell the representatives how the policy would affect you, your family, and your community. These stories can be made even more compelling by clearly expressing the connection between your story and the policy.
- Express your concerns. How will the policy hurt you and others? Do you live near a factory or plant that emits a lot of pollution? Do you or your loved ones suffer from illnesses or health issues related directly to factory pollution? The EPA won't know your concerns if you don't voice them.
- Visual aids, such as photos, petition cards and medical bills, can help you tell your story.
- You don't need to sound like an expert but evidence and facts should accompany your personal story. Your testimony should address the actual or possible effects of a policy, as well as your feelings and experiences connected to the policy.

Things to Remember

- Try not to directly read from your written testimony. Instead, try to engage the committee with your story. Look the members in the eye and speak loud, clear and confident into the microphone.
- Try not to repeat what other speakers have said. Share your own thoughts that may add a new or different point of view.

- Be prepared to answer questions. Committee members may ask question, which will give you an opportunity to further explain, but don't answer questions that you can't answer correctly.
- Bring at least 3 copies of your testimony. You'll have to submit one copy to the official US EPA record. Make sure the copies are double-spaced and easy to read.
- Be sure to include your name and some form of contact information. However, know that your testimony will be made a public document.
- Thank the Agency for providing you with the opportunity to speak

What Can You Expect at the Hearing?

When you arrive at the venue, you will have 'check-in'. You can submit a copy of your testimony when you check-in or wait to submit it until after you have delivered your comments in the public hearing room.

Expect that there will be a wait. It is a good idea to listen to the testimonies of the people before you. This will ensure that you don't repeat what everyone else has said. It is also important to know and be able to rebut the opposition's argument.

The representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency will be seated in the front of the room. You can expect 3 to 5 representatives present to listen to your testimony.

When you are called, it is most likely you will be called in a group, and each of you will have 5 minutes to share your testimony. There will be a clock with visual clues (i.e. green for go and red for stop) used to monitor the time.

Remember to state your name.

Tell your story. Describe your situation. Explain how you, your family and your community will be affected.

Remember to be respectful to everyone in the room--the committee members, other speakers, opposition and anyone else present. You can disagree without being disrespectful.

Environmental Justice Stance

EJ "demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation." Communities of color, Indigenous Peoples and low-income communities continue to be disproportionately affected by climate change, so it is important that those are the voices shaping the climate change debate. Through personal testimony, we can influence the transition to greener and cleaner renewable energy and ensure that carbon reduction strategies do not negatively impact public health or worsen existing health disparities among our communities.

***This article makes reference to material from Sierra Club's "US EPA Public Hearings: How to Prepare My Testimony"**

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