

TIPS FOR TESTIFYING BEFORE NEW HAMPSHIRE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES

The New Hampshire legislative process encourages citizen input. In New Hampshire, each bill is required to have a public hearing before it is voted up or down. In making an effective presentation at a legislative public hearing, it is advisable to keep the following points in mind:

- 1. Obtain a copy of the bill** and review it (a limited number of copies are available at the hearing). Verify that it is the most recent version available prior to preparing your statement. Having a copy of the bill to reference at the hearing allows you to refer to specific sections in your presentation or when answering questions.
- 2. Prepare your presentation in advance.** Review your statement out-loud beforehand. It is advisable to keep your spoken statement to 5-8 minutes. Prepare a written copy of your statement to distribute at the hearing (it can be longer than your spoken comments). For a Senate hearing bring at least 10 copies of your statement - one for the committee's clerk, six for the committee members and three for media representatives. For distribution at House hearings bring at least 30 copies.
In your opening remarks, identify yourself (name, title or professional status, town of residence or location of your business/organization). Next, establish yourself as one qualified to speak on the issue because it affects you/your organization or because you have expertise on the issue. Then describe in conversational language the effects of the proposed legislation on you or your organization. Conclude with a polite request that the legislature vote this measure for passage, for defeat, into study, or with the changes you recommend. Then, offer to respond to questions or provide further information.
- 3. Verify the date, time and location of the hearing.** Parking in Concord is extremely competitive. Public parking structures allow parking for more than one hour: one is in the first block of School St. off of Main St. and another is on State St. next to the YMCA. Street metered parking is available - bring quarters and dimes. Most street-side meters are limited to 1-2 hours. A parking ticket usually costs \$5 if paid within 5 days.
- 4. Arrive promptly and be prepared to wait.** The hearing rooms fill up early and there are a limited number of seats. Often, there are public hearings on other bills scheduled that may be running late. Bring materials to work on at one of the hallway seats or observe the committee in action.
- 5. Upon arriving at the hearing room, register to testify before the hearing begins.** House Committees prefer you to fill out a card (available on a small table in front of the committee "u" shaped seating) and give it to one of the legislators at the head of the "u" shaped seating arrangement. The card will ask you for your position on the bill and how long you expect to speak (remember - less than 8 minutes). The Senate Committees will either have cards to fill out or a sheet to sign up on for a specific bill.
- 6. Listen to those who testify before you.** Usually, supporters and opposition are called in rotation after bill sponsors, legislators, and state agencies. To be effective, your presentation must be flexible. If someone has made a point you planned to state, note briefly your support of the previous speaker and add your additional information. Your statement to the committee should be not be read verbatim. Use this opportunity to make eye contact with members of the committee on important points.
- 7. After you have completed** your statement, the committee chairperson will ask if the committee members have any questions. Address the chairperson or committee member each time you answer a question. **Don't let nit-picking or potentially hostile questions cause you to lose your composure. Do not become angry or argumentative - it never helps.** It is not appropriate decorum to ask questions of the committee members. **If you do not understand a question ask the committee chairperson for more qualification. Don't attempt to answer questions for which you do not have the facts.** Preserve your credibility by offering to obtain the information and forward it to the committee. Never misrepresent a fact nor offer an opinion for which you do not have back-up information.
- 8. Above all, relax and enjoy the experience of making your opinion part of the permanent public record on an important issue.** Hearings are scheduled for the sole purpose of obtaining information from the public. Even though legislators and others may disagree with your viewpoint, legislators want and need your comments before voting on a bill.