

Maryland Office of People's Counsel Guidelines for Public Testimony at General Assembly Bill Hearings

The Office of People's Counsel is an independent state agency responsible for representing the interests of all residential customers of regulated utilities in Maryland. We have prepared the following general guidelines for individuals or organizations who are interested in providing written or oral testimony at a General Assembly bill hearing.

1. You may access information about the members of the General Assembly and the Committees of the House and the Senate, specific bills and bill hearings at www.mlis.state.md.us, the official website of the General Assembly. The Department of Legislative Service also provides helpful information about the legislative process – how a bill becomes a law” - on its website at <http://dls.state.md.us>
2. You may express your position on a bill in a telephone call, letter or e-mail to members of the General Assembly, and/or provide written and/or oral testimony at a bill hearing.
3. The General Assembly holds hearings on bills to allow interested persons an opportunity to testify in support or in opposition to the bill, to provide information to the members of the Committee, and give Committee members an opportunity to ask questions and seek information related to the bill. These hearings are held prior to a Committee vote on the bill. If the vote is “favorable” or “favorable with amendments,” the bill will be submitted to the full House or Senate for discussion and vote (2nd reader) or a vote (3rd reader). If the vote is favorable, the bill will be sent to the other chamber for consideration.
4. A notice of a bill hearing is posted on the General Assembly website, with the date, time and location. **You should check the schedule** to make sure that it has not been postponed to a new date or time. This can happen frequently during the last weeks of the session.

5. You must sign a witness sheet if you intend to testify before a committee. Each Senate and House Committee has its own rules for sign-up deadlines and for submission of written testimony. These rules are listed on the Committee hearing schedule.

6. The Chair of the Committee or a designee will conduct the bill hearing. The bill hearing may be attended by all or only some of the Committee members. During the later days of the session, Committee members may be attending caucus or other meetings, or appearing before other Committees on their own bills, and are not available for Committee hearings. The Chair or designee will be seated in front of the room, and will call the names of persons to testify. You may not be called in the order on the sign-up sheet. The hearing is recorded.

7. The Chair or designee has the discretion to limit comments. If there are a large number of persons providing testimony, or it is later in the session, you may be asked to join others on a joint panel or to limit your comments (sometimes to 3 minutes). The time limits are firm.

8. TIPS for Participation in a Bill Hearing:

- Come early and drop off the correct number of copies of any written testimony with the Committee Staff. This will be distributed to the Committee members prior to the bill hearing.
- Sign the sign-up sheet if you wish to testify
- Prepare your comments ahead of time. If you submit a written statement, do not repeat it. Highlight the main points.
- Speak slowly and clearly, give your name, and identify your organization, association or specific interest in the bill for the record.