

Participation in Maryland General Assembly Bill Hearings

Oral Testimony

Each committee has their own rules for how testimony will be heard. Generally, a bill or series of bills will be announced. The sponsor of the bill (Senator or Delegate) will give a description of the bill and testify on why it's needed. The sponsor may bring up witnesses they've selected to speak in support of the bill. Once they've finished, the chair of the committee will usually call upon expert witness panels: one to testify in support and one against the bill(s). After they finish, the chair will start calling upon everyone else who has signed up to testify, usually in alphabetical order of each witness's last name. The witness will be given a set time to testify (usually 2-3 minutes) on the bill or bills before them. Reading what you've submitted as written testimony is generally frowned upon. Instead, make or further a point that has not been stated yet by someone else. Respectfully speak your mind. Be sincere and concise. Committee members may ask questions of you, so be ready to think on your feet. When the committee is finished with you, they'll call the next name to testify. If you're called upon and someone has already covered your points, it doesn't hurt to simply say "Support" or "Oppose" and cede your time.

These hearings can last quite a while and sometimes into the evening. Other bills may be heard before the bill(s) you are interested in come up, so be prepared to wait some time to speak.

Written Testimony

Once again, each committee has their own rules for submitting written testimony. Senate and House committees require multiple copies of your testimony and there is a submission deadline which must be met in person. Contact the committee staff ahead of time to determine the number of copies required. Written testimony must include the following on the front page: the bill number, the name of the individual or organization submitting the testimony, and their position (Support, Support with Amendments, Oppose, or Informational). Submitting written testimony alone doesn't require you to enter yourself on the touchscreens for your testimony to be received, but it doesn't hurt for you to do that as well. If you are unable to come down to Annapolis to submit your testimony yourself, reach out to your fellow supporters. The Senator or Delegate's staff for your jurisdiction may be able to help as well.