

# Testifying at Hearings

Testifying at public legislative hearings is an important and effective tool to advance advocacy efforts. In Massachusetts, legislative committees must hold public hearings on each of the over 7,000 bills filed each session. Traditionally, hearings are held in the spring, early summer, and fall of the first year of the 2-year legislative session. Hearing agendas typically consist of between 20 and 50 bills. Action on the bills occurs after the hearing, in a committee poll, or in an executive session, which is not open to the public.

**The Legislature's hearings and events calendar is regularly updated and can be found [here](#).**

The committee chairs determine the order of public testimony. Elected and administrative officials are given priority to testify at the outset of a hearing and are intermittently taken out of turn.

**Please note:** The Massachusetts Legislature is a busy place, with many concurrent events. It is common for committee members to come and go from hearings.

Importantly, all committees now use a hybrid hearing structure that allows for both in-person and remote participation from legislators and the public. The hearing notice typically relays a deadline and link to sign up for both in-person and virtual testimony, which is usually about a week in advance of the hearing date.

## BEFORE THE HEARING



- **Notify MMS Staff.** If you would like to testify at a hearing in your individual capacity, please notify the MMS government relations and advocacy team in advance at [advocacy@mms.org](mailto:advocacy@mms.org). The President of the Medical Society is our primary spokesperson testifying on behalf of the MMS at legislative hearings.
- **Register.** When presenting oral testimony, you sign up online or at the hearing. MMS staff can assist you in navigating the sign-up process.
- **Draft your oral testimony.** Committees typically limit oral testimony presentations to two or three minutes. Practice your remarks to ensure you can make your most relevant points within the set timeframe.
- **Prepare personal anecdotes.** Nothing drives home the importance of an issue like a personal story. The best way to humanize an issue is sharing how it affects your patients or your practice. It can also help bridge a common disconnect between proposed policies and the practical impact on the practice of medicine and access to care for patients.
- **Arrive early.** Leave plenty of time to get through State House security before the hearing. On busy days on Beacon Hill, the line to enter the building can reach the street. Arriving early will also help you secure a seat in the hearing room.

## AT THE HEARING



- **Begin** by thanking the committee chairs and members for the opportunity to testify, introduce yourself, and clearly identify what bill you are supporting/opposing.
 

*Please note: If you are testifying in an individual capacity, please refrain from saying you are testifying on behalf of MMS unless you are explicitly asked or authorized to do so.*
- **Minimize reading your written testimony,** try to summarize your remarks.
- Answer questions as honestly but briefly as possible. It's okay if you don't know the answer to a member's question. Simply thank them for the good question and offer assurance that you will follow-up with the committee in writing once you've had the opportunity to look into it.
- If possible, listen to the testifiers before you and try not to repeat messages; refer to other testimony/build off other people's remarks.
- It's okay to respectfully disagree with a legislator, but do not argue or be disrespectful to a legislator or staff member.
- **You may present your oral testimony as part of a group or panel.** In such cases, the three minutes per presenter rule still holds, and the panel should be organized enough that each presenter is saying or focusing on something different.
- **Close** by restating your support for the bill and thanking the committee for the opportunity to testify.



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## AFTER THE HEARING



- While it is not required, it is often helpful to submit written testimony that expands upon your oral testimony and answers any questions that you received from committee members in greater detail. Instructions about how to submit written testimony and the deadlines to do so are always included in hearing notices.
- Written testimony is a good opportunity to provide the committee with relevant data/research findings that help make your case.
- There are typically no page limits for written testimony but try to keep yours to 3 pages or less.
- If your State Representative and/or State Senator doesn't sit on the committee, be sure to let them know that you testified at a hearing on an issue of importance to you.



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