



TEXAS LEGISLATURE

How to Testify in Committee

Providing verbal, in-person testimony at the Texas Capitol is one of the most effective ways for citizens to participate in and influence the legislative process. We've created this "How-To Testify" guide for people who want their voices heard and are eager to advocate for their community.

★ HOW THE COMMITTEE PROCESS WORKS

Once a bill is filed by an author, it is assigned to one of many committees, depending on the nature of the bill. It is during open committee hearings that the general public and subject matter experts are invited to share their perspectives and expertise that can help legislators understand the impact a bill could have on the lives of Texans.

★ PROVIDING IN-PERSON TESTIMONY

On the day of the hearing, the committee chair will call each bill as it comes up to be heard by the committee. After a bill is called and its author explains the bill, the chair will call out names of people who have registered to provide oral, in-person testimony, or "witnesses."

When your name is called as a witness, you will go up to the committee panel or podium, state your name, who you represent, your position on the bill, and then provide your testimony.

★ PREPARING YOUR TESTIMONY

First and foremost, it is important to note that there are time limits to each testimony. The chair will cut you off once your time has passed. However, these time limitations are up to the discretion of the committee chair, as well as how many other witnesses have signed up to provide testimonies that day.

Generally speaking, prepare your testimony to be read in two minutes or less. If you have more to say than what you can fit in two minutes, you can prepare two versions of your testimony: one oral and one written. The written testimony can be submitted to the committee and be as long as you like (be sure to print paper copies to hand over to the committee). The oral version of your testimony will be subject to time limitations.



TESTIMONY TIPS

How to Create Your Testimony

1. WRITE IT DOWN

Having a script is highly recommended, as it helps you navigate everything you want to say and how long it takes to say it. Those two or three minutes that you get to testify go by fast, so you should prepare notes — even if you know what you’re going to say because you may get asked questions by the committee.

2. OPENING

- **Greet the committee chairman and committee members.**
- State your name, the organization you are representing/if you’re there as an individual, and whether you’re testifying in support or opposition to the bill. **You should not waste any time with a long introduction. It’s important to be as brief as possible and get to the point.**

3. MAIN MESSAGES

- **Summarize your reasons for your position concisely.** Include examples of:
 - a. The problem (statistics/data or stories)
 - b. How the bill would address the problem/how the bill creates a problem. It should be an easy statement like, **“I’m against the bill because it [insert data/personal story]. If passed, this bill would [insert harm it would create].”**
 - c. Positive outcomes if the bill passes/negative outcomes if the bill passes **OR** Positive outcomes if the bill does not pass/ negative outcomes if the bill does not pass
- **Share your personal story.** Talk about how the bill would impact your life, drawing on real, personal examples. If it’s a bill or issue that you have a personal experience with and you can point to a personal story about the bill that is directly related to the part of the law the bill changes, that is very helpful. It’s important to be specific about why the changes a certain bill proposes are a good idea or a bad idea.
- **Make an explicit ask of the committee members to support/ oppose the bill.** **“I ask that you vote [for/against] this legislation.”**

4. CLOSING

- **Thank the committee members for their time.**
- **Ask if there are any questions from the committee.** Most of the questions won’t be unfriendly, so take a minute to think about what the question is. Just because a question is being asked, that doesn’t mean the committee members disagree with you. They could be trying to support you.
- **Offer yourself and/or your organization as a resource.**



WHILE PREPARING YOUR TESTIMONY, REMEMBER TO:

Be Concise

You will be subject to time limitations.

Be Respectful

While you want to come across as passionate, be sure to avoid using combative language or tactics because remember you're here to convince them to listen to you!

Use Data & Evidence to Support Your Position When Possible

Providing hard facts makes it difficult for anyone to argue.

Print Copies of Your Testimony

to submit to the committee the day of the hearing, along with copies of any supplemental documents your testimony may refer to, like any data, charts, or studies.

Be Yourself

You are here to provide your story and perspective and show how this will impact you. This committee process exists because legislators need to hear from people like you. No one should ever feel that they don't belong or shouldn't testify. It's everybody's first time to testify at some point.



DAY OF YOUR TESTIMONY

Where & When to Arrive

Usually a committee will announce when they plan to hear a particular bill at least 48 hours in advance, but are only required to give 24 hours notice. These hearings can start as early as 8:00 AM or as late as 5:30 PM.

Fig. 1 — You can check when and where your bill has been scheduled for a hearing on the [Texas Legislature Online website](https://www.capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/BillNumber.aspx) by entering your bill number in the top right search bar.

Fig. 2 — Once you're on the bill page, look for its assigned House or Senate committee roughly halfway down the page and click the hyperlink. This will take you to the public notice for the hearing in which your bill will be heard with the time and room number.

[capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/
BillNumber.aspx](https://www.capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/BillNumber.aspx)

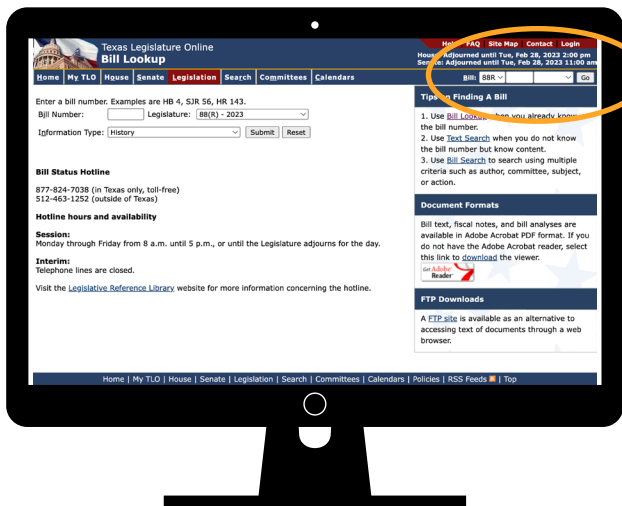


Fig. 1

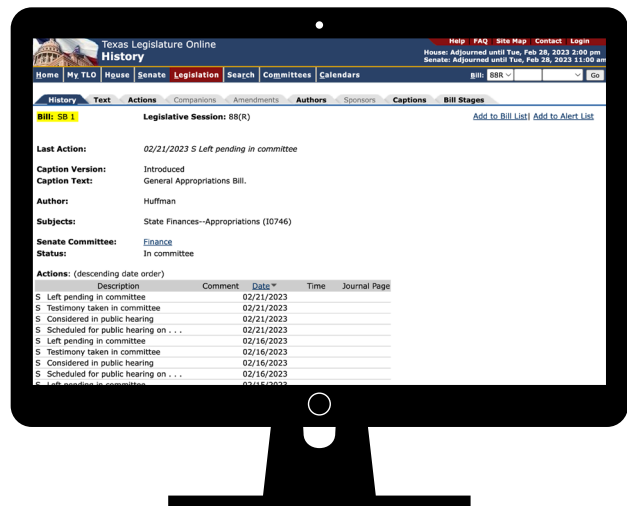


Fig. 2

***** KEEP IN MIND *****

Each committee creates its own rules and processes for hearing testimony so when in doubt, be sure to sign up for [Asian Texans for Justice's Email Alerts](#) to stay up to date on where a bill is!



DAY OF YOUR TESTIMONY

First: Register to Testify

In order to orally share your testimony, you must first register to testify as a witness. You may only register to testify on the day a bill is scheduled to be heard by the assigned committee. You can register at a kiosk/iPad, which are usually located in the hallway between the main concourse and legislator offices in the Capitol Extension (the E Floors). You cannot register in advance but you may register from your personal iPad/phone if you are on-site and connected to the Public-Capitol WiFi network.

★ **MOBILE DEVICE ACCESS**

You can also access House Witness Registration on your device through the capitol's public wireless network:

1. When within network range, tap Settings on your device.
2. Next, tap the Wi-Fi menu. Public-Capitol should display in the Choose a Network list.
3. Tap Public-Capitol to join the network.
4. Once connected to the Wi-Fi Public-Capitol, open a web browser on your device and click this link: <http://hwrs.house.state.tx.us>.

NOTE: Access to House Witness Registration through a mobile device is optimized for iPad running the most recent version of iOS. Earlier iOS versions or other mobile device platforms are not supported.

★ **FOR ASSISTANCE WITH THE REGISTRATION PROCESS**, please contact the committee clerk of the committee for which you wish to testify. You can save time when you arrive at the Texas Capitol to register by creating your public profile in advance and be prepared by knowing:

- **The correct bill number**
- **In which committee hearing the bill is being heard**
- **The time and location of the hearing**

Once you are on the registration welcome screen, select the committee your bill has been assigned to, then select your bill from the list of bills they are hearing that day. You will then enter your position (For/Against) and whether or not you wish to testify. On the next few screens, you will enter your name, job title, and address, as well as designate whether you are testifying on behalf of yourself or a business. You will review all of your information, submit, and then receive a confirmation message.



DAY OF YOUR TESTIMONY

First: Register to Testify



WATCH THIS VIDEO FOR A WALK THROUGH OF HOW TO REGISTER.

In rare cases, particularly if your bill is assigned to the Senate State Affairs committee, you will not be able to digitally register for your hearing. In those cases, you may have to manually register by filling out a physical card in the committee room your hearing has been assigned to.

DAY OF YOUR TESTIMONY

Second: Get Comfortable, Wait, and Be Ready at a Moment's Notice

Each committee makes its own rules regarding the order in which each bill will be heard and in what order they will call witnesses. Sometimes bills will be called according to seniority of its authors, while other times it's "first come, first served" with bill authors lining up in the committee hearing to lay out their bills. Often, bills with a lot of registered witnesses will be held last, in hopes that some registered witnesses have to leave before their bill gets called.

★ **IF YOU MUST LEAVE BEFORE YOU ARE CALLED...**

We know that testifying can require a substantial investment of your time. Not everyone will have the ability to stay at the Capitol until their name is called to testify. In these cases, it's always good to bring multiple copies of your testimony; you can always submit these written versions to the committee clerk if you must leave. Written testimony will still be considered by the committee and is usually read later by their office staff.

For those who do not have time to submit a verbal or written testimony, you can always simply state your position on a bill, also known as "dropping a card," at a kiosk the day of the committee hearing. This registers your position but will not have a corresponding oral or written testimony.

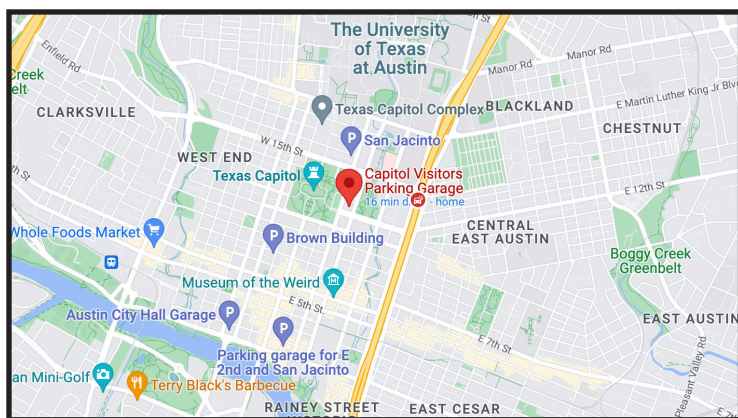


DAY OF YOUR TESTIMONY

What Should I Bring With Me?

- If you have any **documents to share with the committee** (your written testimony, data, reports, etc), you will need **20 copies of each** to give to the committee clerk.
- **Bring chargers for any of your electronics.** We also recommend you bring your electronic devices fully charged.
- **Bring water bottles, refreshments and/or snacks.** There is a cafeteria at the Capitol open from 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM. After it is closed, you will be on your own for food. You don't know how long you may have to wait, so bring things to stay nourished, hydrated, and near your committee room.
- **Bring something to do while waiting to testify.** Remember, there is public WiFi at the Capitol.

Where to Park



Parking can be found at:

Capitol Visitors Parking Garage

1201 San Jacinto Blvd.
Austin, TX 78701

for a fee.

What to Wear

There is no formal dress code at the Capitol. Legislators and legislative staff generally wear **business attire**, so it always helps to look professional.