

GIVING PUBLIC TESTIMONY

The more involved you become in advocating for those with AD/HD or other related issues, the more likely you are to be asked to testify before a state agency workgroup, board, advisory committee, or before a legislative committee. A public hearing is the only official way for an individual to participate in the legislative process. It is a means to make a very favorable impression because it shows that you care enough to stand up and be counted.

How do you prepare for this? What do you need to know?

PREPARING TO GIVE PUBLIC TESTIMONY

- *When planning to give testimony, please contact the CHADD National Office for assistance.*

We have facts to help support your position and/or sample legislation addressing priority issues. Often we can give you guidance on the best way to proceed. Contact the Director of Public Policy at publicpolicy@chadd.org or by calling (301) 306-7070 ext. 109.

- *In most instances, individuals who are going to give testimony at a hearing will be asked to sign in and provide basic information about their testimony.*

Often you will need to inform the department or staff ahead of time that you would like to testify at the hearing. Look for the contact information in the announcement about the hearing. You can usually reply by email, mail or phone. At other times you will register on site either with a staff person or electronically. Cards are sometimes provided for this purpose. Do not hesitate to ask for assistance if needed. The list of those testifying is given to the Chair of the committee and is used to call people up for the testimony. Generally, the earlier you sign in on the day of testimony, the earlier you will be called to speak.

Committee hearings during the legislative session can be very long. As the session draws to a close, hearings can run 12 hours or more. It is not uncommon to wait all day to testify. If you cannot stay, give your written testimony to the committee clerk; ask that it be included as part of the record and that it be distributed to the members. In fact, it's always a good idea to leave a copy of written testimony.

- *Testimony before state agency boards and other bodies and before legislative committees is usually recorded as part of the record of the group's official proceedings.*

Make sure that you use the microphone provided and speak into it. If you need to use an interpreter to help you with verbal communication, make sure that person is also speaking clearly into the microphone.

- *Most state agencies and legislative committees will impose time limits on how long you can speak in giving your testimony.*

Normally an individual is limited to three to five minutes. Because of this, it is vital that you have your main points at hand and that you can get to the point quickly. Crafting your story to address the major points to cover *if* testimony time is limited will become critical. You can always elaborate in your written testimony if there is more that you feel needs to be stated.

- *Stay focused.*

Often during public testimony during committee hearings, legislators get up and move around the room, speak to other members of the committee, or leave altogether. They may even go to get coffee or lunch. Do not be offended by this. This does not mean that your testimony will not be heard or is being discounted. Sometimes legislators are members of a number of committees and duties in these committees may overlap. The legislator may also be called away on urgent business. Sometimes they simply need a break. Hours get very long at the end of the session. Recordings of the testimony are available to the legislators after the meeting for their reference. Committee staff may summarize the key points for legislators.

Do not allow the audience to distract you either. Many legislative committees meet in the House and Senate Chambers when the houses are not in session. Some audience members may be seated but many stand at the periphery of the room. People are often moving around and side conversations are common, even while testimony is being given. Things are usually a little quieter at agency meetings. Be prepared to handle distractions.

- *Bring written copies of your testimony.*

Make sure you have enough copies for all of the committee members and for other interested persons. This is particularly important when you have only a limited time to speak but have important material you may not be able to cover in that time. Written testimony becomes part of the record of the committee's proceedings just as the oral testimony does. When you are called to testify, give your written testimony to the clerk for the committee or the person responsible for taping the hearing. They will pass it out to the members.

- *Agencies, boards, etc., are required under the Americans with Disabilities Act to provide accommodations for persons with disabilities participating in hearings, meetings, etc.*

Notify the coordinator of the meeting or the committee clerk should you or a member of your chapter or organization need accommodations a day or two before you are to come to give testimony. The contact person for this is usually listed in the notice of the meeting.