Providing Testimony

Legislators are interested in gathering information and insight from parties involved with an issue. Take the following steps to make your testimony as effective as possible:

- **Become informed.** Track the status of proposed legislation on the Legislature's web site (www.njleg.state.nj.us). The web site provides information about the bill history, committee agendas, committee aides, public hearing schedules, and bill sponsorship. If you do not have access to a computer, call the New Jersey Office of Legislative Services, Legislative Information and Bill Room (see contact information below) or your state legislative district office for assistance.

- **Know the issue.** In addition to the original bill or resolution text, be aware of any subsequent amendments or proposed changes. Consider opposing viewpoints and other alternatives, and be prepared to discuss the differences. Make sure that your opinions can be substantiated with as many credible facts as possible.

- **Sign up to be a witness.** The committee chair establishes protocol for public testimony. Witnesses are encouraged to register prior to a public hearing or committee meeting so as to be scheduled in accordance with the chair's preference. In some cases, pre-registration may be mandatory. Contact the committee aide to confirm registration procedures. Generally, registered witnesses are given an opportunity to speak. However, if the issue draws particularly large attendance, the chair may limit the number of witnesses and duration of testimony.

- **Be prepared.** Arrive on time and familiarize yourself with the setting, participants and procedures as they relate to the committee. Be sure to confirm the committee agenda a day before the scheduled meeting. Alert the committee aide in advance concerning any special needs, displays or audio-visual equipment.

- **Presenting testimony.** Provide the committee with written copies of the full text of your testimony. However, your oral presentation should be brief and summarize only key points. Listen to testimony given by others who share your views and try not to repeat their remarks. The most engaging public speakers do not read. Use notes if necessary, but try to maintain eye contact with the committee members. Avoid jargon.

- **Be respectful and courteous.** Public hearings and committee meetings are official proceedings. Refrain from outbursts displaying your support or disapproval. In considering a bill, a committee may decide to report the bill to the House or take no action. If the bill is reported, it may be advanced with no changes, with amendments, or by a committee substitute bill. All reported bills and resolutions are accompanied by a committee statement that contains a description of the bill’s provisions and purpose, the nature of any amendments, and any background information the committee may deem necessary. These statements are convenient sources of information for the public.

- **Committee Action.** If a committee does not report a bill, it remains eligible for committee consideration at another time during the two-year legislative session.

Public Participation

The public may provide input during most committee meetings and public hearings.

A committee meets at the call of the chair on a day and time set aside by the presiding officer. The rules of both Houses require that official committee action be taken in meetings open to the general public. Specific notification timelines. Voting to report a bill out of committee requires an affirmative vote of the majority of committee members.

Committee meetings are generally held on Mondays and Thursdays during regular business hours at the State House Annex in Trenton. Public hearings may be held anywhere and at any time throughout the state. Bonds, ballot issues and matters that may have Constitutional significance warrant public hearing. No voting or committee action takes place at the time of the hearing. Registration to provide testimony is generally requested well in advance of the hearing. Testimony is recorded and transcribed at the discretion of the committee chair. Live and archived audio records of select meetings are available on the Legislature’s web site (www.njleg.state.nj.us).

The New Jersey Legislative Calendar lists meeting times, locations and agendas for all scheduled legislative activity, including committee meetings and public hearings. Copies are free of charge from OLS or online. The Legislature’s web site reflects the most recent information available.

For further information, call the OLS Legislative Information and Bill Room at 609-847-3905, or toll-free in NJ: 1-800-792-8630. Hearing Impaired: Dial 711 for NJ Relay.