

Your Voice Matters in 2004 at the Maine Legislature
A guide for reaching state legislators and testifying at hearings
December 19, 2003
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FARM BUREAU MEMBERS...

When You Come To Testify

Your elected state legislators need to know what you think of proposed legislation before they vote on it. You may telephone them, write them letters, fax them or e-mail them to express your position on specific legislation. Another effective way of getting your point across is speaking at a public hearing. Here's how....

INFORMATION ON PUBLIC HEARINGS

There are 3 ways to find out when and where public hearings are being held:

(1) Notice of public hearings will usually be printed 1 or 2 weekends ahead of the hearing in the following newspapers: the *Bangor Daily News* Weekend Edition; the *Maine Sunday Telegram*; and the *Lewiston Sunday Sun*. The notice will include the Legislative Document (LD) number, the title of the bill and the hearing date, time and location: (2) The Legislature's web page contains the public hearing and work session notices. The address is: <http://janus.state.me.us/legis>; (3) If you can't get the information you need from newspapers or the Internet, you can call the Legislative Information Office at 287-1692 or 1-800-301-3178 (TTY 287-6826). Call this office also if you plan to attend a public hearing or work session and you have any special needs. It is helpful to reference the Legislative Document "LD" number when you call for information about a bill.

PREPARING TESTIMONY

If you plan to speak at a public hearing, it is often useful to prepare and distribute your comments in written form. This helps you make clear and concise comments, and ensures the committee members who are not present at the public hearing have the opportunity to receive your input. In preparing testimony, written or not, make sure you introduce yourself and, if you represent an organization, give the name of the organization. State whether you support the bill, oppose it or are offering suggestions to improve it, and then expand your reasoning. If you do provide written testimony, **bring at least 20 copies and give them to the committee clerk before you testify**. Photocopiers are available in the Law and Legislative Reference Library in Room 200 of the State House for a nominal charge.

WHEN YOU ARRIVE

Most committee hearings are held in the State House (the Capitol) or on the second floor of the Cross Office Building. The buildings are connected through an underground connector which can be entered from the ground floor of either building. The committee hearing times and locations are posted on the third floor of the State House and on the second floor of the Cross Office Building.

PUBLIC HEARING PROCEDURES

Speaking order: At the beginning of each hearing, the presiding committee chair will call the public hearing to order and announce the bill to be heard. The legislator who sponsored the bill will introduce the bill, after which, the presiding chair will ask if any other cosponsors wish to testify. Once sponsors and cosponsors have had the opportunity to speak, public testimony is invited. Generally, the public may present testimony in one of three categories in the following order: those favoring the bill, those against the bill, and those neither for nor against the bill but who wish to offer information about the bill. **Note:** The committee may be hearing several bills during a public hearing. Generally the bills are heard in the order in which they are advertised. However, the schedule is subject to change and the length of the hearing on most bills is difficult to predict.

Your turn at the podium: When it is your turn to testify, advance to the podium and sign in. Address the committee as follows: "Senator Smith, Representative Jones and members of the committee." Introduce yourself, indicate who you represent and whether you support the bill, oppose it or are offering suggestions to improve it, and then explain your reasoning. If other speakers have already made your point, let the committee know that you agree with the previous remarks of other speakers, but try to avoid repeating the testimony of previous speakers. When you finish, remain at the podium for a moment, in case committee members want to ask you questions.

Comings and Goings: Many hearings last throughout the day, and many legislators are members of more than one committee. Legislators may need to leave and re-enter the room if they are scheduled to be at a public hearing or work session in another committee. However, they will receive any written information, which is a good reason to provide written testimony.

Decorum in Committee Proceedings: Please direct your comments to the committee, not to the audience, and give your courteous attention to other speakers, regardless of their views. Don't applaud or indicate pleasure or displeasure with anyone's remarks. Only members of the committee may ask questions of persons who testify.

Work Sessions: After the public hearing, a work session is scheduled at which committee members discuss the bill and decide whether to recommend its passage. The public may speak at a work session only if a committee member requests further public input and the presiding chair grants permission. Work sessions on a bill are generally held on a day other than the day of the public hearing. If you would like to find out when a work session will be held, ask the clerk how to do that.

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