

## Tips for Testifying at Public Hearings

State and local legislative hearings and town meetings are an opportunity to speak directly to decision-makers about body confidence issues and the ways youth are impacted in your community.

It is helpful to do some advance research to find out who is on the committee and what district they represent. Ideally, some of the advocates who testify on behalf of your legislation to promote body confidence and reduce eating disorders will live in a committee member's district.

- Prior to the hearing/meeting, be sure to check the schedule/calendar for any last-minute changes and postponements.
- At the hearing/meeting, check in – you may be asked to sign in as a speaker.
- Public forums may start with an explanation of the rules, order of speakers, etc.
- In many cases, the moderator/committee chair calls speakers from a list. In other cases, you may need to volunteer to speak by walking up to the microphone.
- When you stand up to speak, give yourself a moment to collect your thoughts at the microphone – do not feel rushed – this is your time. Breathe. When you are ready, introduce yourself.
- To introduce yourself, include your full name, where you live, and your specific personal or professional connection to the issue the legislation will address, such as body confidence or eating disorders – *explain why you care*.
- Make sure to reference the correct bill number and lead sponsor.
- If you are nervous – say so! It humanizes you and breaks the ice!
- Do not get caught up in presenting every fact under the sun in your oral testimony. You will be much more persuasive and memorable if your words paint a picture of the “problem” you seek to fix – through YOUR eyes and YOUR experience. Statistics have nothing on personal stories!

- Keep it short! Make your point quickly and clearly. A good guideline is 3 minutes per person.
- You can usually submit written testimony to support your spoken statement. Use your written testimony for ALL of the details and data you wish to present. Do NOT read it to the committee!
- Keep it personal! Show how the issue affects you, your family, and friends. This is easier for people to understand than facts and figures.
- Keep it local! Give specific examples when you can.
- Make eye contact and do not be afraid to use some appropriate humor if that makes you feel more comfortable.
- Remind decision-makers why you care about this issue and that you are counting on them to help.
- Offer yourself up as a local resource if they have any questions about the points you covered in the future.
- Since you are testifying about an issue that matters to you, consider taking pictures to capture the moment for a local press release or your organization's website, social media, fundraising appeal, or newsletter.

### **Testifying at a Virtual Hearing**

State and local legislative hearings and town meetings may switch to an online, virtual platform. Your testimony is still crucial and can still provide an opportunity to speak directly to decision-makers. In addition to following the guidelines mentioned above, below are some helpful tips for testifying on a virtual platform:

- Avoid any busy backdrops or backgrounds that can be distracting.
- Do not have any family members, co-workers, or pets on screen with you.
- Test your lighting and audio prior to testifying. It is best to be on Wi-Fi, if possible, for good sound and video quality.
- Have your notes close to the camera so you can keep your face and eyes up as much as possible.
- Look directly into your computer camera. Keep your audio on mute until you are ready to speak.
- For best sound quality, sit within two feet of your computer.

# Template Script for Testimony

- Hello my name is \_\_\_\_\_.
- I live in \_\_\_\_\_.

***Make eye contact with committee members and smile – they won't bite!***

- I am here today on behalf of (ORGANIZATION FOR WHICH YOU WORK OR VOLUNTEER).
- (ORGANIZATION) is committed to (explain mission of organization).
- I am here to speak in support of (bill number).

***Breathe and smile and take your time!***

- This legislation is important to me because (explain **IN YOUR OWN WORDS THE PROBLEM THAT THE BILL SEEKS TO FIX AND WHY IT MATTERS TO YOU AND YOUR ORGANIZATION.**)
  - Do not use too many statistics here. You can submit a letter to the committee with all of the data and facts you want them to know, but your oral testimony should be PERSONAL. When it comes to this legislation and body confidence, what is your experience? What have you witnessed?
  - Tell them why YOU care and why you want their help.
  - Your goal should be to help lawmakers understand the issue as though they were standing in YOUR shoes in YOUR community.
  - Paint a picture of the problem in your community: What you see. What you hear. What you know to be true.
  - Breathe. Make eye contact with committee members.
- It is for these reasons that I am here today to urge you to support (bill number).
- Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

***Smile and gather your materials from the table – do not rush!***