



Role of a Committee

The Colorado State Constitution requires that every bill be heard on its merits. The purpose of a committee hearing is to gather information so that the committee can make an informed recommendation on a given bill or resolution. Public input is an important part of this process. As elected officials, committee members appreciate hearing the perspective of citizens and organizations on issues.

When a bill is introduced in either the Senate or the House, it is sent to a Committee of Reference comprised of 5 to 13 legislators for review and public comment. The committee determines if the proposal should go forward in the legislature. After the committee considers any proposed amendments, it may vote to favorably recommend the bill to the Committee of the Whole, refer the bill to another committee, or postpone the bill indefinitely.

Committee Schedules

When the legislature is in session, committees generally meet in regularly scheduled rooms at regularly scheduled times. However, they will occasionally meet in different rooms at varying times to accommodate a large audience or remote testimony. Monday mornings (typically 10:00 a.m. until noon) and Friday mornings (typically 9:00 a.m. until noon) are reserved for floor work. Committees with hearings in the morning meet from Upon Adjournment of floor work until noon. At the chair's discretion, morning committees may also meet from 7:30 a.m. until 9:00 a.m. Afternoon committees generally meet at 1:30 p.m. You can find information on bills and committee hearings at: leg.colorado.gov.

Committees meet in several spaces within the Capitol Complex:

- The Senate Committee Room Hallway is located on the 3rd floor between the elevators.
- The House Committee Room Hallway is located on the basement level between the elevators.
- The Legislative Services Building (LSB) is located at 200 E. 14th Avenue, directly south of the Capitol. House Committees meet in LSB-A, which is located on the east side of the first floor of LSB; Senate Committees meet in LSB-B, which is located on the west side of the first floor of LSB.
- Room 271 in the Capitol Building is located between the elevators on the 2nd floor.
- The Old Supreme Court Chamber is at the north end of the 2nd floor of the Capitol Building.

Tracking a Bill

The full text of bills, resolutions, and memorials, and their history, votes, fiscal notes, and committee reports are available online. Bills are named according to the house where they were introduced and the year. For example, Senate Bill 16-001 is the name of the first bill introduced in the Senate during the 2016 Legislative Session. The chair of each committee determines when a bill will be heard.

Preparing to Testify

When preparing your testimony, plan to present in two to three minutes and be prepared to summarize the main points in one minute if asked. If you have a personal experience related to the legislation, your story can provide valuable information for the legislators. It is a good idea to bring a copy of the bill with you to the hearing, and copies of your written testimony for the committee members, bill sponsors, and staff. If you are not sure how many copies to bring, 20 copies will be sufficient.

Signing-in

Hearings usually start on time, but it is best to arrive 30 minutes early, especially for committees that meet Upon Adjournment. In order to testify, it is important that you sign in at the beginning of the hearing or as soon as possible. Each bill on the agenda will have a sign-in sheet that is located on or near the committee table. Fill out all of the information including whether you are in support of the bill, against the bill, or neutral. If you are not representing an organization, write that you are representing yourself. If you have any questions, please ask a member of Legislative Council Staff, who wear red name badges. If you have handouts or copies of your testimony for the committee, give these to staff at the beginning of the hearing or before you speak.

Testifying

The order of bills to be heard is posted outside the door of each committee that is meeting. The chair will announce each bill, after which the bill's sponsor will address the committee. The chair may then ask for testimony from proponents and opponents. Hearings are conducted using formal parliamentary procedure. Here are some helpful testimony tips and FYIs:

- Begin your presentation by stating, "Mr. or Madam Chair ____, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. My name is ____, representing ____, and I am here to support/oppose this bill because . . ."
- Do not read your testimony word for word.
- Be brief and avoid repeating what other witnesses have said. Try to focus on points that have not been mentioned.
- Be authentic, respectful, and passionate. Committee hearings are designed for public input, so don't feel out of place or intimidated. Tell your own energy story.
- Make sure you include your *ask* at the end of your testimony, such as "I ask that you consider my job and my family's livelihood when considering and voting on this bill." Or "I ask that you vote no on this bill."
- At the end of your testimony, thank the committee members and offer to answer any questions.
- If a member asks a question, wait for the chair to prompt you, then state your name followed by, "Chair ____, Senator/Representative ____, the answer to your question is . . ." If you do not know the answer, it is always okay to say that you do not know. If you promise to follow-up, be sure to do so in a timely manner.
- Do not be offended if committee members come and go during a hearing. They have other commitments, including the presentation of bills in other committees that are meeting simultaneously.
- At a hearing with a large number of witnesses, there may not be time for everyone to testify.
- Cell phones and other electronic devices should be on a silent setting.
- Food and beverages are prohibited in the committee rooms.
- The chair has the discretion and authority to limit testimony, ask the sergeant-at-arms to remove a disruptive person from the committee, and clear the public from any hearing in the event of a disturbance which is disruptive to legislative proceedings.
- Committees do not always complete all action on a measure following testimony.
- Public displays or disruption are not allowed (no placards, applause, verbal interruptions, etc.).

Sources:

Memorandum: Public Participation in the Legislative Process, Legislative Council Staff, April 14, 2016

Participation in Legislative Hearings, Colorado General Assembly, leg.colorado.gov/agencies/house-representatives/participation-legislative-hearings