



Testifying at Budget Hearings

Before any votes are taken on the state budget, the Joint Finance Committee (the powerful budget-writing committee of the state legislature) holds a series of public hearings at locations around the state. Members of the public may testify before the Committee at these budget hearings, while testimony from lobbyists is generally frowned upon.

The Committee wants to hear from the public about issues that concern them. That makes these hearings a great chance for your board and leadership team to provide testimony highlighting the most important issues for your district.

Prepare

- Notify the WASB if you plan to attend and testify at a hearing.
- Write out your testimony in advance and bring a copy.
- If you have never been to a hearing before, it can be helpful to watch portions of past hearings on Wisconsin Eye (<http://www.wiseye.org/>) to get a feel for how a public hearing operates.
- Bring a pen and notepad to use for taking notes.
- Even if your legislator is not on the JFC, if a hearing is held in or near your district, there is a good chance your local legislators will attend and sometimes they fill in for JFC members.
- WASB Issue Papers on our state budget webpage cover priority budget issues and are a great resource for preparing testimony.

Arrive Onsite

- When you arrive at the location, look for signs directing you where to park.
- To testify, you will need to fill out a registration slip. There will be signs and likely a line for registering if you arrive early.
- Procedures may vary somewhat depending upon COVID protocols at the host location of the hearing.
- When you get to the front of the line, fill out your registration and submit it to the Capitol staff at the hearing. Also give the staff the copy of your written testimony. They will make copies and distribute them to the committee members when they return to Madison.
- Once registered, be prepared to wait (perhaps for several hours) before you are called to testify. In typical years, these hearings attract hundreds of people who wish to speak. Despite the pandemic we expect this trend to continue with numbers down only slightly.
- People are called to testify in the order they register. In general, the earlier you can get to the hearing site and register, the earlier you will be able to speak.

Testifying

- Because these hearings draw a crowd, a strict time limit of 2 minutes will be imposed on those testifying. Those testifying as part of a group of four or more will be given 5 minutes.
- If you are able to bring a group of four from your district, you can maximize your time. You can have one person do all the talking or split it up between members of the group.

- When you are called to testify, **briefly** thank the committee for the opportunity to testify and identify yourself and your school district. Keep your comments brief and to the point. Be prepared to lead with your most important issue and provide local examples.
- Two minutes can fly by, so do not spend precious time on pleasantries, get to the main points. Your written copy of your testimony can explain your points in greater detail or cover additional points.

Finally, feel a great sense of accomplishment for having participated in your state government as an advocate for your district and the students you serve. Well done!