

# OFFERING WRITTEN TESTIMONY

by Richard P. Burke, Executive Director  
Western Liberty Network

**Offering written testimony is always a good idea.** While providing oral testimony can be very powerful, those who testify often get two or three minutes to say what they want. Sometimes, if a lot of people want to testify, not everyone gets a chance to do so.

**Offering written testimony is a way to ensure you will be able to say all of the things you need to say.** Doing so also ensures that your testimony will get into the public record. If you get to provide both oral and written testimony, the combination of the two can be very powerful. That said, don't overwhelm your reader. Provide as many arguments as you need to, but be judicious. The longer a document is, the less likely it is to be read. Try to limit your written testimony to two pages.

**When providing written testimony in environments where copies are distributed among those you are testifying to, make sure you have enough copies for every member of the board, commission or committee you will be testifying to.** Also provide a few extra copies for committee assistants and administrators (this is less of an issue when you are uploading your testimony to a website). If you plan to follow up by visiting policy makers personally, always have copies with you.

**Take into account that your testimony might not be read by the policy makers you are trying to reach directly.** Some public office holders read everything they can. Others a paragraph or two. Others don't read much written testimony at all; they ask their aides to do it and then brief them on anything they find interesting or compelling. For this reason, always treat legislative aids and committee staff respectfully. Sometimes, reaching one of those people can be as effective as reaching a policy maker himself/herself.

**After you provide written testimony, follow up with the policy makers you provided it to by contacting them or their staff members.** In this way, even if you get them to do nothing more than acknowledge your testimony, your document will be more likely to be properly read instead of being discarded with the many other testimonials they have to wade through.

## HERE IS AN EFFECTIVE WAY FOR YOU TO STRUCTURE YOUR WRITTEN TESTIMONY

### I. INTRODUCTION

**Begin your document by introducing yourself.** Tell them your name, any title you might have, and the name of any organization you represent. If you have any special qualifications, certifications, or other credentials, share those as well. Tell them what you are testifying about and what you are trying to convince policy makers to do by offering your testimony. If a policy maker or his/her aide only reads this paragraph, they will know who you are, who you represent, why your testimony should be seen as credible, and what you want them to do.

### II. PREVIEW OF YOUR TESTIMONY

**Provide a forecast of what you are going to say to the reader.** First, tell the reader what main points you will make in support of or in opposition to whatever policy they are considering. Don't

make the points here, just tell the reader what they are. Second. tell them what you want them to do. Don't provide details here, just tell them what you want them to do. Finally, tell them what benefits will be realized and what disadvantages will be avoided, if policymakers heed your testimony. The reader will then know what your main points are and what the gist of your testimony is. If the reader is interested in digging further, he or she will continue reading.

### III. YOUR ARGUMENTS

**Lay each argument you wish to present individually with your most important arguments first.** In each case, make an contention, provide some evidence in support of your argument, and tell what your argument means to the larger point. When you cite evidence, it is always a good idea to point out that the evidence you cite is attached to your testimony as a separate document. Repeat this process with each argument you wish to advance.

**If you have a personal story to share, share it.** In politics, compelling personal stories can often outweigh dry information provided by lawyers, scientists, statisticians, and public office holders even if the information they provide is weighty. If the issue at hand affects you personally, don't be afraid to weave your story into your arguments.

### IV. REVIEW YOUR DOCUMENT

**Here, you wrap up your testimony.** This should be a short paragraph that summarizes your arguments, what they collectively mean for the policy that is under consideration and why, given the information you provide in your testimony, the policy proposal before the public board should be adopted or rejected.

### V. CONCLUDE YOUR DOCUMENT.

**Here, you thank the public board you are addressing (in particular the presiding officer of that board) for their attention.** Make yourself available if board members have questions or want good information. Provide good contact information for yourself and then make sure you are accessible.

**Following these guidelines will not guarantee the result you want, but those following these guidelines (or similar guidelines) will experience more success than those who do not. Over time, you will get better at this skill. The most important thing you can do now is to start writing!**

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