

Public hearings give you an opportunity to express your opinion on an issue in a formal way to the deciding committee or governing body. Offering oral testimony is the most powerful way to present testimony. Even if you plan to speak at the hearing, you should submit written testimony in case time runs out for speakers at the hearing.

Step 1: Research the Issue.

- How did this issue come before the committee and why is this issue relevant?
- How is this issue currently addressed by law?
- What stage is the issue in the legislative process and what is the next step in the process?
- Does CAI have any public policies on the issue? Is the issue a CAI Federal or State priority?
- Who are the committee members that will decide the issue? Visit the legislative chamber to understand the environment.
- What is opposition's point of view? Could you compromise on some parts with them?

Step 2: Develop 2-3 key points that you want to convey to the committee.

- **Use layperson's terms.** Avoid jargon and too many statistics.
- **Personalize your testimony.** What does it mean to you? Use anecdotes from your community.

Step 3: Prepare Written Testimony

Written testimony should be **no longer than one page** and limited to one bill or issue. Always be polite and positive and do not attack or threaten a government official.

Header	• Include your name and or the CAI Legislative Action Committee you represent. • Include the name and or number of the bill or the issue and your position.
Salutation	• Address the testimony to the chair of the committee in a formal way. For example, "Dear Madam Chair".
1st Paragraph	• Identify yourself as a member of CAI and a constituent, resident, or professional working with a community association. • Identify any elected or volunteer positions you hold within your community association, local CAI Chapter, or state legislative action committee. • Include both the association names and the number of homes you are representing. • In your own words, state the purpose of your letter and your position on the issue.
2nd Paragraph	• State and explain the 2-3 points you developed in Step 2. Make sure to include how this decision impacts you, your association, or your business.
3rd Paragraph	• Offer <i>positive</i> suggestions or alternative strategies to resolve the issue.
Final Paragraph	• Thank the legislator or committee for hearing your concerns. Ask them to support your position, for example, "Therefore, I urge the committee to support HB 309."

Step 4: Prepare Oral Testimony (optional)

- Oral testimonies generally have a time limit of 2-3 minutes at the legislative hearing.
- Speaking at the hearing allows you to really emphasize the personal impact of the issue on you and your community. Facts and figures are great, but personalized testimony is the most effective.
- Practice. Time yourself delivering your testimony to a friend or spouse. Aim to make your testimony shorter than the time allowed.
- Think about potential questions the committee might ask you and prepare *concise* answers.

Step 5: Attend the Legislative Hearing

- Wear conservative/business attire and arrive early.
- Before the committee hearing starts review written testimony of other parties and meet other witnesses on your panel or other panels.
- This is a great time to connect with people who share your views. Sit with people that share your views and support those that give oral testimony.

Step 6: Deliver Oral Testimony at the Hearing (optional)

1. **Fill out a speaker's request form.** Submit it to the committee clerk before the hearing starts.
2. **Pay close attention to the hearing.** It is common for legislators to enter and leave during hearings, but you should pay attention so that you can modify your testimony.
 - Listen to the questions the legislators pose to other witnesses. Were the witnesses able to answer the question? Did they answer the question accurately?
 - Answer the questions that were not able to be answered by previous advocates. Personal anecdotes are a great way to put a fresh spin on your key points.
3. **Deliver Your Oral Testimony.** The clerk will call you to testify. At the podium, there might be a system of lights to help you stay within the time limit (Green, good; yellow, 1-minute left; red, stop). It is always best end on time.

Introduction	Look directly at the chairperson/questioner. Thank the chair for the opportunity to speak. "Mr. Chair" or "Madam Chair, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today."
Identify yourself, your credentials, and your CAI membership	State your name for the record, then "I am a manager/resident/attorney in a/for community association(s) and I am a member of CAI." If no one has described CAI, do so briefly. "CAI is a 40,000-member, international organization dedicated to building better communities through education and advocacy."
Deliver your key points using personal experiences	You have done your homework and practiced so you can use a relaxed conversational style. You have listened to the other speakers so that you will not repeat what others before you said. Do not read or memorize your testimony but use notes for guidance.
Answer questions	Wait briefly after you finish for committee members to ask questions. Be polite but assertive. Respond directly to the question posed and answer concisely and honestly. Do not be afraid to say, "I don't know." You can submit the answer after the hearing in writing.

Step 7: Next Steps

1. Follow up with any information you promised to the committee. This is the opportunity for you to become an advisor on community association issues so that the legislator calls you when issues arise in the future.
2. Let your partners in advocacy know what you gleaned from the hearing.
3. Identify next steps. What happened following the hearing? Who supported or opposed the bill?