

Texas Legislature

The Texas Legislature, composed of 150 members in the House of Representatives and 31 members in the Senate, meets in regular legislative sessions beginning in January for 140 days every odd-numbered year. The governor can also call the Legislature into special sessions, each of which can last no longer than 30 days, although more than one may be called per interim.

SENATE

In the Senate, the presiding officer is the lieutenant governor. The lieutenant governor appoints members of the Senate to committees, designates the chairs of those committees and refers bills to committees. The lieutenant governor also sets most bills for floor consideration on the Senate intent calendar. Generally, the lieutenant governor has discretion on whether a bill is deliberated by members of the Senate, and bills set on the intent calendar are not always necessarily considered. Any bills considered will not necessarily be considered in the order listed on the calendar. Bills designated as local or uncontested are scheduled for consideration by the Senate Administration Committee.

HOUSE

In the House, the presiding officer is the speaker who is elected by the members. The speaker appoints members of the House to committees, including the chairs of those committees, and refers bills to committees. The House Calendars Committee schedules bills for consideration on the House floor, and the bills generally must be considered in the order they are placed on the calendar. Bills that are designated as local or uncontested are scheduled for consideration by the Local and Consent Calendars Committee.

COMMITTEE PROCESS

Once a bill is assigned to a Senate or House committee, it may be scheduled for a hearing to receive public testimony.

If you are interested in providing testimony on a particular bill during session, you should generally plan on spending a full day at the Capitol, and possibly the evening as well. The Legislature is a moving target, and the committee hearing schedule printed in the morning could change. Committees may have to recess while the House or Senate is in session, or they may not start meeting until late in the day. Bills may not necessarily be considered in the order they are posted on a committee hearing notice, if at all.

Before providing testimony, you will need to complete a witness affirmation form with your contact information and indicate whether you support, oppose or remain neutral on the particular bill. If you are unable to testify, you may still submit a witness affirmation form indicating whether you support or oppose the bill, and it will be noted in the official record.

AT THE CAPITOL

The TAC Legislative staff can help coordinate your presentation to the Legislature and assist you in navigating the building, registering to testify and managing the legislative scheduling process. Please let them know when you're planning a visit so they may help you get the maximum benefit from your time at the Capitol.

WITNESS REGISTRATION

Online witness registration is the new, quick and paperless way to register and complete the witness affirmation form for upcoming committee hearings in both the House and the Senate. Complete the five-step registration process when you arrive at the Capitol by using the touch screen kiosk stations located in the Capitol Extension. You can choose to save your profile information to use for future hearings. You can save time by creating your public profile in advance; however, you may only register for, against or on a bill at the kiosk stations in the Capitol or from a mobile device when connected to the Capitol wifi network by visiting <http://hwrs.house.state.tx.us>. Be prepared by knowing:

- **The correct bill number.**
- **The committee in which the bill is being heard.**
- **The time and location of the hearing.**

Registration stations are located in the Capitol Extension on levels 1 and 2. However, some Senate committees will require a paper affirmation form that you will fill out in the committee room. For assistance with the registration process, please contact the committee clerk of the committee for which you wish to testify. TAC Legislative staff is also available to assist you.

COMMITTEE TESTIMONY TIPS

Before the hearing:

- **Share concerns prior to the hearing.** Deliver the important information prior to the hearing. Meet with members or their staffs and let them know what's important. If you oppose a bill or have specific concerns, it is important to try to notify the legislator and/or staff prior to a committee hearing so they are aware of the concerns and will not be surprised. If a bill has a potential local fiscal impact, try to provide specific information to the bill author and the Legislative Budget Board as soon as possible, and to TAC Legislative staff before the hearing.
- **Familiarize yourself with the members.** Know the members who know the issue. If possible, know your allies and your opponents.

During the hearing:

- **Be brief.** Keep your testimony brief. Expect time limits. Be prepared to limit your testimony to three to five minutes (or within the allotted time frame).
- **Be courteous to all.** When testifying, always be courteous to every member of the committee. Recognize all the committee members and thank them for providing you the opportunity to testify.

- **Remain honest.** Always be honest. Never mislead the committee or give incorrect information. If you don't know the answer, don't be afraid to tell them you don't know and will get back to them about the specific topic.
- **Testify on the local impact.** Try to include testimony on the local impact of a particular bill. Address how the bill would affect your county, office or taxpayers, if possible. Be prepared to address any financial implications.
- **Avoid repetition.** Try not to repeat prior testimony. Often, prior witnesses will deliver testimony similar to your intended remarks. If that is the case, do your best not to repeat the same testimony, but offer a different angle or discuss a specific local impact.
- **Summarize testimony.** Try not to read your testimony. If possible, organize your testimony on an index card and summarize key points. Be conversational with the committee on your issue. Avoid feeling blindsided by preparing to answer questions like "What is your proposed solution?," "Have you meet with others in your community to discuss this issue and what do you think?" and "Do other counties have this issue?"
- **Distribute handouts.** Provide written handouts of your testimony and any supporting documentation to the committee clerk when you approach to present your testimony. Keep them simple, well-written and easy to understand. It is also recommended to email the committee clerk your testimony either before or immediately following your presentation
- **Know that your testimony is part of the official record.** Remember that your testimony is still considered even though the entire committee may not be present. At times, usually because of member schedules, there may be only a few members of the committee at a hearing listening to testimony. However, the testimony is considered part of the official record, and all committee members will typically receive copies of any written testimony submitted and/or receive a briefing from their staffs.

GENERAL LEGISLATIVE ADVICE

- **When you are at the Capitol, wear business attire.**
- **Learn about a legislator's background,** committee assignments, voting history, personal and business interests and past support for local government. Do this before your initial contact.
- **If you are unable to testify in person,** contact information for individual legislators and committees (after appointed) is available on the TAC website under the Legislative section.
- **Meet with your legislators prior to session.** Let them know your issues.
- Get to know your legislator's staff and work with them.
- It's a good idea to let your local legislators know when you're planning to be at the Capitol, even if they are not on the committee you're testifying before. You will want them to be familiar with your issue if

they're approached by a member of the committee.

- When speaking with a legislator, always be brief and to the point. Try to emphasize the important parts of your message within the first three minutes.
- The mere fact that you want a certain bill to pass or that it is "good for county government" is generally not enough. **Focus on how the issue would affect your county.** Discuss how significant the legislator's vote can be on the way your county serves your constituency.
- **Never blindside a legislator.** Always tell the entire story.
- After presenting your case to the legislator, simply ask the direct question, **"May I count on your support?"** If the legislator agrees, extend your appreciation and offer your assistance. If the legislator is noncommittal, seek out their concerns. Schedule another visit to present new material that may help persuade the legislator to vote your way. Don't be discouraged. It sometimes takes a series of contacts to win over a legislator.
- If the legislator continues to be noncommittal, ask colleagues in the legislator's district to help. Contact from several county officials and constituents could help demonstrate community and constituent support for your position.
- **Be understanding.** Recognize there are legitimate differences of opinion. Show the legislator the consideration you expect for yourself. If the legislator chooses to vote differently from your position, politely express your disappointment and offer a closing argument to support your issue.
- Don't expect the legislator to have your familiarity with county issues. **Share what you know.**
- When you work on legislation, always follow your bill throughout the process. If the bill requires a state agency to implement the legislation, follow the rulemaking process on the issue. The intent of the bill could be drastically altered in the rulemaking process.
- When a legislator or a staff member contacts you for information, respond promptly with accurate information. TAC staff may be able to assist you with additional documentation.
- Be prepared to discuss your issue(s) anywhere at any time. You may run across a member who needs information on demand.
- **Know the deadlines.** The House and Senate have different deadlines.
- **Turn off your cell phone** or put it on vibrate in committee hearings, legislative offices and the House or Senate Gallery.