



Parents as Teachers®

# giving legislative testimony



**ADVOCACY TOOLKIT**



## Use this toolkit to:

- > Learn what to expect at a legislative hearing
- > Understand the features and qualities of strong oral and written legislative testimony (see samples)
- > Get tips on how to testify like a professional (see samples)

## Giving Legislative Testimony

The colorful infographic below – "How Our Laws Are Made" – demonstrates in a simple way just how complicated the law-making process can be at the Federal level. And it's often no simpler in states. The infographic shows the numerous steps a bill takes to become a law. Where do you fit in? What is your role as a home visiting and early childhood education advocate? At what point can you intervene?

One of the most impactful ways home visiting advocates can provide input into the bill writing and revision process is by providing legislative testimony.



Click the infographic to see a larger version.

Mike Wirth & Suzanne Cooper Cuasco Ph.D., "How Our Laws Are Made," (2010).



## Definitions

**Committee Clerk** – usually a staff person for members of a standing committee who prepares for committee meetings, tracks bills, and assists the chairman in scheduling hearings. The clerk typically prepares and arranges for hearings including coordinating the list of persons submitting testimony.

**Hearing** – an informal or formal information gathering session, sometimes called a “briefing,” held by a government agency or legislative body.

**Legislative Testimony** – legislative or public testimony (oral and written) is a process that allows individuals or organizations to officially participate in government decisions, while helping legislators to gather facts and hear arguments. By submitting written testimony or testifying orally an individual or organization has the opportunity to influence decisions in the public interest.

**Legislature** – a deliberative body of persons, usually elected, who are empowered to make, change, or repeal laws. Legislatures are sometimes called an assembly, council, or board.

**Sponsor** – a legislator who presents a bill for consideration. Those who join a sponsor in support of a bill are known as cosponsors.

**Committee** – committees specialize in considering a particular subject area, such as education, appropriations, or environmental issues. Ad hoc, interim, and select committees, as they are sometimes called, might study and receive public comment on time-sensitive or controversial topics.

## Why testify?

Providing testimony at a legislative hearing is an effective way to educate policymakers about the impact of existing laws or proposals for new laws. Whether you consider the legislation to be positive or harmful, your voice can make the difference in whether a committee decides to move a bill forward. Elected officials are not always aware of the implications a bill may have on children and families. By offering testimony, you can help to influence the process. First, verbal testimony has an immediate impact, especially if the elected official does not have time to read the written testimony. Second, hearings are often covered by the media, and are an opportunity to get your message out to the public, not just decision makers. Finally, appearing in person sends an important message regarding your level of commitment to the issue and its importance in your community.

## What is the role of a committee in the legislative process?

When a bill is introduced, it is typically sent to a committee. The committee makes an initial determination if the proposal should go forward. If it votes to do so, the committee can suggest amendments to the bill, approve it for further action by the full legislature, or disapprove it. Alternatively, the committee chair may set a date and time for a public hearing on the proposal.



## Who can testify?

Anyone can testify at a hearing. In order to testify, you must find out when a hearing is held and follow the procedures for signing up.

## When are hearings held?

Check your legislature's website for a schedule of hearings. Usually the date, time, and location will be identified on either the committee website or on a hearing webpage. For example in Iowa, the state legislature is referred to as the Iowa General Assembly and the assembly's website address is: [www.legis.iowa.gov](http://www.legis.iowa.gov).

Also, every day during the legislative session, the legislature typically publishes a legislative bulletin which contains the notices of hearings. Unfortunately, the legislature's rules often do not require a lot of advance notice. Sometimes you only have a few days to prepare testimony and arrange to testify before a committee. Call the committee clerk or committee chair's office if you cannot find information about a particular hearing time on the main legislative website.

## Who sits on a committee?

The composition of a committee is usually determined by which political party holds the majority. The committee chair will usually be a member of the majority party. The chair presides over the meeting. A committee secretary, or the chair's staff person, takes notes and assists the chair.

To learn more about a committee's role in the state legislative process and how to testify, watch: "[Making a Difference – A Citizen's Guide on How to Testify](#)" to see an informational video produced by the Oregon State Legislature's Legislative Media Service demonstrating how citizens can add their voice to the state legislative process and help shape state laws. The video covers protocols and procedures of testifying before a committee.



## What should I do in advance of the hearing?

The following are some tips for preparing to testify:

- > Call the committee staff. Each committee determines its own rules and procedures for accepting written and verbal testimony.
- > Call your legislator. Try to let your Senator or Representative know ahead of time that you intend to testify – so that, he or she can try to meet you there. Also, you can introduce yourself to the committee clerk, especially if you have any questions or special needs. Members of the committee usually welcome casual introductions before the start of an official meeting, so introduce yourself before the hearing begins.
- > Prepare your testimony. Usually there is a time limit for presenting legislative testimony to a committee, ranging from two to five minutes. Prepare your presentation to include two or three key points. If you are nervous, it might be helpful to practice reciting your testimony beforehand. Also, prepare a written version of your testimony to submit to the committee.
- > Arrive early. During the legislative session, committee rooms can fill up fast. To be sure that you have an opportunity to speak, arrive early enough to get a seat. If you are attending a local government body, (a local commission or city council) for a public hearing, you may have to complete a sign-up sheet before the meeting begins. If you do not arrive early, prepare for the possibility that you may have to wait or might not be able to get into the room, especially if it is a controversial issue.

## What is the order of business during a hearing?

When the time comes to consider a particular bill, the chair will announce the bill's name and number. The sponsor or sponsors will explain the proposal (bill) to the committee. Any member of the committee may ask the sponsor questions. Then the chair will ask if anyone in the audience wants to comment on the proposal -- either for it or against it, or for informational purposes (often a way for state agency staff to speak about a bill). Committee members may also ask questions. When everyone has spoken, the committee discusses the proposal, considers amendments and decides if the bill should go forward or be stopped.

## What should I do and say if I testify?

When it is time for you to testify, you may approach the podium, and courteously address the chair of the committee and the committee members. You will not be “sworn in” like you would be if you were testifying in a courtroom.





*Nancy Keel, Executive Director of the Kansas Parents as Teachers Association, testifies before a committee in the Kansas legislature.*

## Top 10 tips for providing oral testimony

1. At the beginning of the hearing be certain to submit your written testimony and any other information supporting your comments to the clerk. Print and bring enough copies so the clerk can distribute them to the members of the committee.
2. Identify yourself by giving your name and telling the committee where you are from. If you are testifying for a specific group, coalition or union, state the name of the organization or group, briefly describe the group's mission, and state how many members it has. It may sound like this: "Senator Smith and members of the committee, I am Suzy Ryan from Binghamton, NY and I am here to support Senate Bill 132, the Home Visiting Accountability Act."
3. Listen to the testimony that is presented before you speak. Make sure you do not repeat what a previous speaker has said.
4. Make your testimony personal. For example, tell a personal story of an experience that relates directly to the issue, or describe how you are affected. Do not read your testimony, but tell it from the heart!
5. Never blame anyone or make accusatory remarks. Don't argue with committee members.
6. Connect your issue to individual members on the committee. Learn about the committee member's districts in advance and mention examples that directly impact the individuals that live in their districts. For example, if there is a home visiting program located in the town or school that is located in a committee member's district, mention it.
7. If you wish to convey amendments or revisions to legislation, provide your edited version of the bill, or provide those changes in advance.
8. End your testimony by requesting an action. State carefully and specifically what you would like the committee or sponsor to do or not to do, such as, "Please do not reduce funding for home visiting programs." Try to offer solutions because solutions or feasible alternatives are always well received.
9. Always close your presentation by thanking the committee or council and ask that your comments be submitted to the "record." Submitting comments to the record makes them a part of any official written transcripts of the meeting.

If you want to underscore a previous mentioned comment, say something like, "As stated by the previous speaker, this issue is important to me, too, because \_\_\_\_\_", instead of repeating the same statement.



- > Offer to answer any questions. It is usually acceptable for legislators to interrupt the presenter to ask questions. Answer the question and return to where you left off in your testimony. Be sure to answer questions honestly. If you do not know the answer, say so, and if possible, defer the question to another witness that may have the information, or let the member know you will follow up with their staff.



Michael Penn | Juneau Empire

*Satnam Sears, with her 15-month-old son, Jonathan and Talea Kellar, of the Association for the Education of Young Children, advocate for funding for AEYC's Parents as Teachers program in Juneau. Residents gave testimony on the state operating budget before the Alaska House Finance Committee.*

## What should I do if some of the committee members are not in their seats?

Once the Chair recognizes you, you can proceed with your testimony. Expect that legislators will come and go often. Legislators are frequently on other committees and have other meetings or hearings going on at the same time. Legislators have been known to eat during hearings and to talk to each other while someone is testifying. While this may seem disrespectful to you, it is important to realize that legislators often do not get time for a lunch break.

## What happens after I testify?

If you have time after the hearing, talk with committee members. Even if they don't appear to agree with your position, they will appreciate your interest. You can stay and watch the rest of the proceedings or you can leave the committee room after you testify.



## What happens to the bill?

The committee will usually schedule a work session on the bill or discuss it immediately after testimony. During that time they will debate the issues, offer amendments (changes to a bill) if necessary, and finally vote on the bill and send it to the floor for full debate.

## How do I follow up after testifying?

- > Put copies of your testimony in the Capitol mail boxes of committee members who were not at the hearing or be sure to give those copies to the clerk for distribution.
- > After testifying, send a letter to the committee members and their staff thanking them for their time and attention, and answering any additional questions or concerns you did not address during your testimony.
- > Use your testimony in other ways: submit it as an op-ed article or letter to the editor in your local newspaper; send it to other legislators who are not on the committee but will have to vote on the bill; or send it to the editorial board of your local newspaper urging them to write an editorial on the issue.





## Tips for Writing Testimony

### Content

- > Identify yourself and the organization you represent.
- > State your position as "for" or "against" the proposed bill and identify the bill by name and number.
- > Summarize your recommendations first, and then add explanation.
- > Restate your position at the end of your testimony.
- > If your testimony is very technical, provide details.

### Style

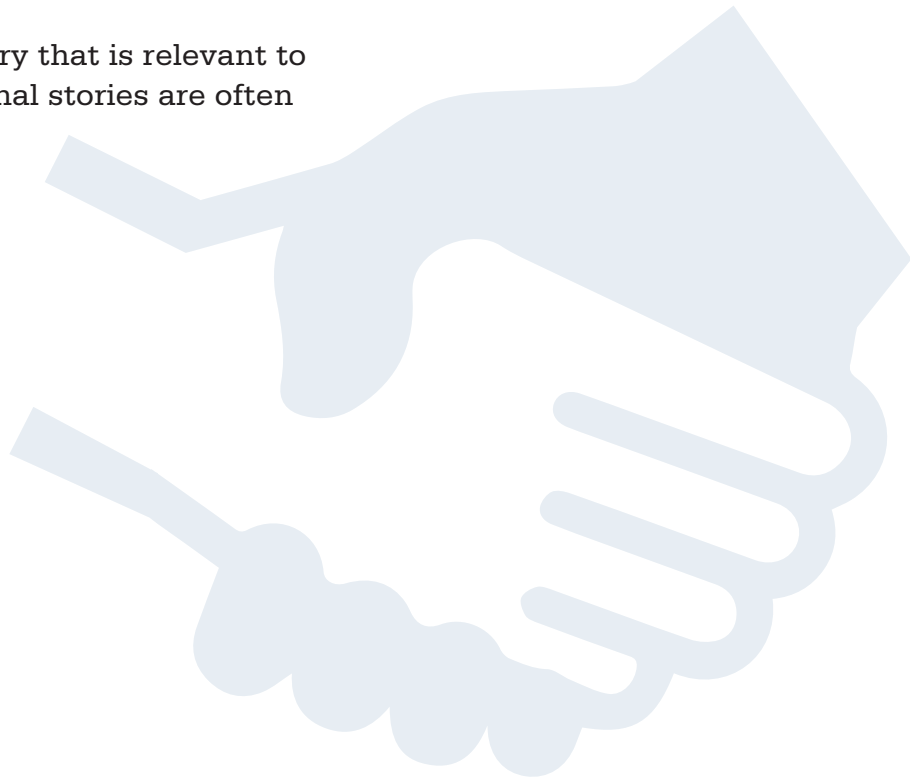
- > Write from your own experience whenever possible. The committee wants to know how the bill will affect you and your program or community.
- > Be accurate. Facts and other evidence are always important.
- > Include a personal story that is relevant to your testimony. Personal stories are often as impactful as data.

### Formatting

- > Double-space your written testimony.
- > Type on only one side of the paper.
- > Number the pages and add your name and the date as a footer.
- > Do not write in all capital letters.
- > Be sure to include your name and contact information.

### Sample Documents

On the next several pages are sample testimony for reference.





**SAMPLE**

**Sample Testimony**

Testimony for Public Hearing  
Education, Health and Social Services  
February 16, 2014

Your Full Name  
Street Address  
City or Town, State Zip Code

Good Afternoon Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ (first name, last name) and I am \_\_\_\_\_ (title/role).

This bill proposes \_\_\_\_\_ (short description of proposed legislation).

I would like you to support/oppose this legislation. This proposal would \_\_\_\_\_

(description of the bill from your point of view). Under the current conditions the outcome would be

\_\_\_\_\_ (describe the impact on: the system of early care and education, home visiting

infrastructure, budget impact etc.). Families and young children will be impacted in the following ways:

(describe the impact from the point of view of a child or family.)

My family will also be affected because \_\_\_\_\_ (provide a personal example of the impact).

Thank you for your careful consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,

(Sign your name)



*Sabrina Jenkins, Parents as Teachers mom and now parent educator from the CHIP of Virginia/Parents as Teachers Program testified at the U.S. Senate Law Enforcement Caucus about the reauthorization of MIECHV.*

**Statement of Sabrina Jenkins  
Former Participant, Parents as Teachers  
Before the U.S. Senate Bipartisan Law Enforcement Caucus  
Wednesday, February 4, 2015**

Good afternoon Senator Blunt, Senator Coons, and Members of the Law Enforcement Caucus. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of other moms and families like mine in support of evidence-based home visiting and the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program. My name is Sabrina Jenkins and I am a former participant in the Parents as Teachers program delivered by CHIP of Virginia of South Hampton Roads located in Chesapeake, Virginia. I am also the proud wife to my loving husband Shawn, and the mother of four growing boys.

I am honored to be here today and would like to thank Senator Blunt and Senator Coons for their commitment to improving the health and well-being of children with evidence based home visiting programs such as Parents as Teachers. This program has meant so much to me and my family and I feel very strongly that if every mother in our program could be here to tell you their story, they would be because it is truly a remarkable program that makes a difference.

After I had my first three sons, we fell on really hard times. My husband who is a skilled painter lost his job and became a private contractor with irregular and inconsistent work. We lost our private health insurance, and we struggled to make ends meet while I stayed at home to care for the boys. I wanted to work, but child care was just too expensive and I could not find a job making enough money to justify going back to work. In fact, we would have been “in the hole” if I had taken the jobs available to me and had to pay for child care.

Ms. Jenkins thanks the Caucus members for allowing her to testify.

Ms. Jenkins identifies herself and the organization on whose behalf she is testifying.

Ms. Jenkins states her “position”—she advocates for Parents as Teachers and believes every family should have the opportunity to participate in Parents as Teachers.

Ms. Jenkins provides her personal story/testimony to the Caucus.



**Statement from Sabrina Jenkins** *(continued)*

We were able to access Medicaid for the boys, food stamps and a community heating assistance program, but we really needed two incomes and my husband and I needed health insurance. We also incurred a few large emergency room visit expenses that put us even further behind. When I found out that I was pregnant with my fourth baby, I was honestly overwhelmed. Two of my boys suffer from severe asthma and their medical condition kept me constantly on alert for the next attack.

I was sleep deprived from worrying; worrying about bills, about the boys' asthma, and about how we could possibly support another child. I often felt depressed that I wasn't doing enough. My mom was there for me as best she could, and my husband wanted to be but was busy trying to bring home a paycheck, and I often felt very alone. I did not really have anyone to help me cope with having young children with such severe medical conditions and a new baby on the way that might share that condition.

I was first introduced to the CHIP of Virginia Parents as Teachers program when an outreach coordinator at my obstetrician's office said hello to me at my baby's first checkup. I was a little skeptical about home visiting at first, but wanted the best for my family, so I gave it a try. As a participant of the Parents as Teachers program I received visits from a trained parent educator twice a month for about two years starting just after the birth of my youngest son. I also received a few visits from a registered nurse.

I already had 3 sons so I thought I knew parenting pretty well. But my parent educator was able to help me learn a lot of new things. I learned how to adjust our home environment to reduce my sons' allergies and asthma attacks and how to monitor my new baby's developmental progress. He was born with a heart murmur. As a mom, it really empowered me to have a parent educator who I could trust with questions about my children's development and health. I was a little nervous about having another baby with another health issue, and I wanted to make sure I understood how to assess his developmental growth. My parent educator nurtured my confidence and I felt like a more successful parent.

My parent educator also helped my family set goals to get our financial situation turned around and to help me pursue higher education. After the boys' asthma was stabilized and my baby was healthy, I went back to school. With much encouragement and support from my parent educator I graduated from the CHIP of Virginia Parents as Teacher Program at about the same time that I completed my Associates Degree. I have since completed a Bachelor's degree in Human Service and now work as a Parent Educator.

Ms. Jenkins describes the specific ways Parents as Teachers helped her family get back on its feet. Her story is compelling and factual, and for these reasons her testimony is influential to lawmakers.



**Statement from Sabrina Jenkins** *(continued)*

It's because of this program that I was able to keep my boys healthy and strong and to get them ready for school. I also successfully set goals and achieved them. I felt in charge of my life and our future rather than waiting to see what would happen next. I now have a degree, a great job and health insurance. My husband still works too much, but we no longer need a helping hand from public resources.

As I look toward the future and see the impact that I can have by working with moms in our program, I can tell you that home visiting is a very effective way to increase parent knowledge of their child's development, provide early detection of developmental delays and health issues, help get kids ready for school, and in many cases - prevent abuse and neglect. If we can empower parents with strong parenting skills, we can ensure the next generation is prepared to be successful in school, career, and life.

I truly thank the members of this caucus for your continued support of the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, which funds CHIP of Virginia Parents as Teachers. And, I am grateful for the opportunity to testify today.

Ms. Jenkins identifies the goals Parents as Teachers helped her set and meet, such as earning a degree and getting a job. She describes how Parents as Teachers can help other families, too.

Ms. Jenkins concludes with a thank you to Caucus members.

Sabrina Jenkins  
Parent Educator  
CHIP of South Hampton Roads  
1302 Jefferson Street, Chesapeake, VA 23324



March 5, 2015

Chairman Carpenter and Members of the House Standing Committee on Social Services Budget:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Kansas Parents as Teachers Association. KPATA is a 501(c)(3) organization with over 200 members throughout Kansas.

For 25 years, Kansas Parents as Teachers has served parents with children prenatal to 3 years of age. Using educational and family well-being models to support parents, effective home visiting helps prevent negative family and child outcomes. A two generational program, Parents as Teachers partners with parents, guardians, grandparents, mothers and fathers, and foster parents as their child's first and most important teachers, resulting in thriving families and children who are healthy, safe, and ready to learn. Parents as Teachers has four interrelated components: personal visits, group connections, screenings, and resource connections. Using a research informed curriculum, certified parent educators emphasize parent-child interaction, development-centered parenting (child development) and family well-being to optimize children's early learning, building on family strengths, identifying goals, and monitoring child progress. Educators connect families with community services and resources, referring when needed to reduce the need for remediation which is more costly in later years.

Currently, Parents as Teachers is serving families that reflect the demographics of their communities. This strategy has allowed programs to make local decisions about the populations served. In several of our communities we are enrolling more parents with developmental delays who have typically developing children. Here is an example. At a home visit with a new family, the parent educator noted an older child in the home and asked the mom why she was out of school today. Mom reported she didn't know how to get her enrolled. Since the school was within walking distance from the home, the parent educator and family walked to the school and started the enrollment process. Establishing family and community supports were crucial in building a successful foundation for this parent's success along with continued parenting education from Parents as Teachers. This family would not qualify as a low income family but yet has considerable needs.

An important emphasis for Parents as Teachers is to serve first time parents while pregnant or with a newborn. Beginning Parents as Teachers near birth is ideal as research indicates that parents need to be in the program at least 2 years

Ms. Keel addresses the Chairman and Committee members.

Ms. Keel thanks the members and identifies the organization with which she is affiliated (KPATA), and provides a brief statement describing KPATA to familiarize members.

Ms. Keel provides a thorough overview of Parents as Teachers' goals and outcomes, and explains the model's four interrelated components.

Ms. Keel offers a specific example of a parent educator assisting a family with the school registration process, and the value this assistance had because the family was unfamiliar with the process.



**Statement from Nancy Keel** *(continued)*

to receive optimal benefits. Therefore many of our parents are young and launching their lives with all of the extra expenses of a new baby. Some of the young families are not low income, yet have new careers, are working parents, have child care expenses, may be mobile without the support of family and friends, and may have medical bills. These families have very little disposable income and paying for another service is out of their reach. Parents as Teachers is a primary prevention program so starting Parents as Teachers with families early prevents issues, and strengthens and supports families.

Ms. Keel explains the unique benefits of Parents as Teachers and emphasizes the needs of families.

Local Parents as Teachers programs are participating in data collection with the Parents as Teachers national office and the Kansas State Department of Education. The national data is collected to ensure that programs are replicating the Parents as Teachers model the way it is intended in order to get strong outcomes. Local programs also collect data and report it to KSDE. This data has been collected for the past three years and permits long term evaluation. We will be able to follow Parents as Teachers children from kindergarten through high school graduation, providing the longitudinal data needed to support the effectiveness of Parents as Teachers in Kansas.

Ms. Keel references data collection efforts and the impact this data will have on longitudinal research studies of Parents as Teachers' effectiveness.

Both the National data and the KSDE data are shared back with the local programs. This allows local programs to review their successes and identify areas for improvement in order to construct continuous quality improvement plans.

Ms. Keel emphasizes that local programs are utilizing data in order to improve program quality and program infrastructure. This tells lawmakers that Parents as Teachers is able and willing to improve programs and adapt to community needs.

Another issue that has been discussed this year is instituting a sliding fee scale charging parents for Parents as Teachers. Since this is something school districts have not been doing, it will take funding to determine policies and infrastructure so programs can ask parents for income verification, determine who should pay and who should not, charge the fees, and bill and collect the fees. Since an increase in Parents as Teachers funding has not occurred since 2008, and an increase is not likely this coming year, the policy and infrastructure could make it necessary to decrease the number of families served to pay the costs.

Research has shown that the early years in a child's life – when the human brain is forming – represent a critically important window of opportunity to develop a child's full potential and shape key academic, social, and cognitive skills that determine a child's success in school and in life.

Thank you so much for allowing this testimony today.

Again, Ms. Keel thanks members for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,  
Nancy Keel  
Executive Director  
Kansas Parents as Teachers Association



Testimony in support of SB 925 An Act establishing a home visiting program consortium by Carolyn Signorelli Member, Prevention Partners for Children in Connecticut.

<http://1.usa.gov/1QJ0aEy>

Letter of Support (Testimony) for Evidence Based Home Visiting Programs By Sara Crow, The Next Generation in California.

<http://bit.ly/1LhlXS>

Testimony to the Budget Oversight Hearing for the DC Department of Health as delivered by the Wes Rivers, Health Policy Analyst for the DC Fiscal Policy Institute.

<http://bit.ly/1MV5dUh>

Testimony before the Joint Fiscal Committees on the SFY 2015–16 New York Executive Budget Human Services Budget Hearing February 4, 2015 Submitted by Kate Breslin, President and CEO Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy.

<http://bit.ly/1VjfgHp>







Parents as Teachers®