

Personal Testimony Toolkit

HB 282 & SB 171

(Last Updated 6/18/21)

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

- If you've never provided testimony before - Read through "[What Is Personal Testimony?](#)" and "[How Do You Prepare To Use Personal Testimony.](#)"
- Use the "[Answer These Questions](#)" section to help you draft your testimony.
- Use the [Talking Points](#) and [Analysis](#) to help you edit the testimony to back up your emotional story with facts.
- [Format your written testimony](#) appropriately and submit with the instructions provided [here](#).
- [Share](#) your testimony with us.
- HB 282 Fill in our Action [Report](#) once you've sent in your testimony.
- Working on Action Report for SB 171
- After you have completed your testimony, share it on Social Media or with your listservs! Here is a Social Media Toolkit - <http://bit.ly/brinebillssocialmediatoolkit>
- Links to the Bills [SB 171](#) and [HB 272](#)

GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESS:

(from [Community Toolbox](#))

What is personal testimony?

Someone who gives personal testimony at a public hearing (such as community groups, church, non-profit groups, AA meetings, etc.) describes to decision-makers or the people in power how changes in a law or policy will impact his or her life. Our lives are affected every day in some way by the laws and policies of our federal, state, and local governments and their agencies. Our lives become better or worse as these regulations change or new ones go into effect. Luckily, before laws and policies can be altered, public hearings are often held to give citizens a chance to voice their support for or their concern about proposed changes. Of course, testimony

also can be given in places other than public hearings. What we say can make a difference. This section tells you how to do it.

Why does personal testimony work?

Personal testimony works because it provides a personal, first-hand account of how laws and policies have a real, daily impact on the average Joe. Often, policy makers are removed from the effects of their decisions and can't really know the harm or good they cause. Personal testimony gives those who are in power a more "human" perspective on how effective, ineffective, beneficial or problematic a policy is or could be for a community. Personal testimony can influence the passage, revision, or defeat of policies and regulations proposed by state or federal legislatures, county commissions, city councils, or school boards because it shows law makers how "average Americans" feel about the job elected officials are doing.

How do you prepare to use personal testimony?

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Write down what really makes you mad about this policy.

Set aside 10 to 20 minutes to get your thoughts and feelings down on paper. When you start writing, don't stop, even if your grammar, spelling and organization are terrible. At this point, you don't care if your testimony looks pretty. It's always better to first think about what you want to say, and then write it down. Some people, however, like to write down their ideas as they come. Choose whatever style works for you, as long as your final copy has thought-out and clear ideas about what you want to say.

Reread and edit what you wrote.

Take a break and come back in a little while. Now is when you should cross out bad spelling, poor sentence structures, and swear words. It's time to organize your thoughts. Practice reading out loud to get used to your voice delivering a speech, and get comfortable with the language you will be using.

Think about how this proposed policy change will help or hurt you and others.

This is where you will make your point clear to decision-makers about the policy. Illustrate how the voters who elected them will benefit or not from the change in policy. Think about specific examples, present a story of yourself or someone you know related to the policy's impact. Talk to people that feel like you in the community and collect their stories.

Back up your emotional story with facts

Before you step up to speak your mind, you need more than just raw emotion. You need evidence or proof. Prepare a testimony that addresses the actual or potential effects of a policy, not just your feelings. For example, how will this decision, policy or regulation impact local groups or community groups? How will citizens be helped or harmed by it? What will this policy mean to the generations of children who will follow you? For instance, suppose a city commission decides to grant a tax break to a large discount business that plans to build a store in your town. Supposedly, the store will bring tons of new jobs to the area. However, you disagree. For you, this corporation is already very rich, and doesn't really need to save on a tax break. You believe that letting this discount corporation come into your town will kill the small, individual-owned business that help your neighbors and friends to earn their living. You must start your research. Collect data about this company, find out what is their profit and why they don't need the tax break. Find numbers, graphs, flow charts. Find information about what happened when other big corporations came to your community. Prepare a future projection study to evaluate the effects this company may have in your community in the future. Find out which specific business may close down if this corporation comes to town. Talk to their owners, get their numbers, too. Arm yourself with facts for any question you may be asked.

Write a conclusion.

Sum up your testimony, hitting on the punch lines of your talk, that is, how this proposed regulation is good or bad. Find out how much time you will have available to speak, and trim your speech to that time frame. Personal testimonies normally last about two to three minutes, but there's much variation in this.

Answer these questions while you prepare for your testimony:

To whom are you speaking when you give your testimony?

Ultimately, you want to persuade law or decision makers to adopt your point of view. But you may want to stir up the fiery emotions of other citizens who can back up your claims and give you strength in numbers. Who will witness your testimony--just law makers, or community members as well? If you suspect that you'll draw a large crowd, it can't hurt to play up the emotional, human side of your testimony while you defend your position.

What do you know about the attitudes of decision-makers towards the proposed changes?

Even if a new policy or proposed changes will really make your life difficult, you may have a hard time convincing officials to reject the measure if they are true-blue supporters. Once you know what part(s) of the measure lawmakers are particularly attached to, maybe you can build your testimony around some 'weak link', or less popular aspect, of the proposal.

What are the responsibilities of committee members as office holders? Who are the people who elect them to office?

For example, suppose you want to give testimony to the school board on how important it is to provide instructional materials on family planning and contraception to school children. Consider what kind of voters live in that particular district. If your neighbors are dyed-in-the-wool conservatives, they may not like such a curriculum. You may have to be careful with the kind of arguments you present to the school board and how strongly you voice your disagreement with whatever your neighbors say, or you may turn the decision makers against you

What does the current policy say and how does it affect you?

In order for you to make a case for your viewpoint, you need to show how your life is right now because a certain policy does or doesn't exist. For example, you may be against an initiative that repeals that state mandate on

safety belt use. Perhaps you can bring in pictures of your last auto accident in which you and your children would have been seriously injured had you all not been wearing your seat belts. Is there anything more effective than color photos?

What are the proposed changes and how will they impact your life?

Just as you may need to show how beneficial a policy is for you, you may need to show how harmful an existing policy could be for you and why proposed changes should be passed. For example, suppose you suffer from horrendous asthma and are always fighting off respiratory infections because the people with whom you work in city hall smoke like chimneys. One of your city commissioners just proposed a no smoking ban in all city buildings. How will the passage of this provision help you?

After you have found answers to these questions, prepare your testimony. This means writing out beforehand what you want to say and what's at issue:

- What are the proposed changes, and do you support them or are you against them?
- What are the reasons why you feel the way you do? How do or will the changes affect you? Give examples.
- How do or will the changes affect your neighbors, your friends, your community, state, etc.? If you can, provide statistics on how many people could be or are affected by a policy.
- What do you suggest in lieu of the proposed changes, if you disagree with them?
- Write out your thoughts and notes on paper, as you might write a letter to the editor.
- Practice explaining your position out loud to an imaginary audience. Double check your testimony with a friend, asking her to comment on how well you testify and how well you support your arguments.
- Time yourself. How long does it take you to tell your side of the story? Personal testimonies normally last about two to three minutes.
- Memorize your comments as much as possible before you give your testimony. Being familiar with what you want to say helps convey the important information to the right people in a short amount of time.

- Make notes on index cards of the important points you definitely want to include in your testimony. That way, you won't forget them once you're standing in front of an audience. Remember, you only have one chance and two to three minutes to get your point across.
- If you have never given personal testimonies before, you may want to attend a few committee meetings in advance to get an idea of how people present their arguments and tell their stories in front of the decision makers. Believe it or not, the style in which you present your side can help or hurt your cause, and watching others will clue you in to what works and what doesn't.

“How To Speak With Ohio Legislators and Be Heard”

For more help, please feel free to watch the “[How To Speak With Ohio Legislators and Be Heard](#)” [video](#) (reference is made to SB 784. SB 109 is now that bill with some changes).

HOW TO FORMAT AND SUBMIT YOUR WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Testimony is usually required to be submitted with a Witness Information Form (preferably in the same document) no later than 24 hours before the hearing. *Notice of hearings is very last minute. Have you signed our petition <https://bit.ly/ohstopspreadingbrine> yet? We will present it to the Committee and use it to keep you informed.*

SB 171 - [Send this form \(PDF\)](#) or [this form \(MS Word\)](#) with your testimony to the Colin.Phillips@ohiosenate.gov by the deadline of Monday, June 22nd at 4PM

If you can, please sign up to testify in person in Columbus on Tues. at 4PM in the South Hearing Room

SB 171 has an opponent hearing this upcoming week (June 22) at 4 PM in Senate Agriculture Committee, South Hearing Room

If you would like to submit testimony, please email the testimony and a completed witness slip to our office 24 hours prior to the meeting (Monday, June 21st by 4PM)

HB - 282 - Send [this form \(PDF\)](#) or [this form \(MS Word\)](#) with your testimony to the rachel.ehresman@ohiohouse.gov.

Chairman Stephens kindly requests that all testifying parties submit written testimony and a completed witness slip to his office 24 hours prior to committee. Testimony can be emailed to rachel.ehresman@ohiohouse.gov

Chairman Stephens kindly requests that all amendments and substitute bills be submitted to the Chair's office by 5pm the day prior to committee.

Please contact Chairman Stephens' office with any questions 614-466-1366

SAMPLE TESTIMONY

Examples of testimony from previous bills are [here](#) and [here](#). Below is one sample testimony using the structure above.

Chairman Stephens, Vice-Chair, Ranking Member and Members of the Committee: I oppose House Bill 282, the proposal to legalize the use of so-called “brine” from oil and gas extractions as a de-icer and dust control chemical on Ohio’s public roads and highways.

I am a resident of Morrow County Ohio. I am a Grandmother, a Mother, and a former Science Teacher.

This brine is oil and gas industry waste containing dozens of toxic chemicals including radioactive wastes. The effects of rains, stormy weather and wind will move these poisons not just onto surface waters but also into homes when windows are open and dust blows in. Science has already made it clear that so-called “brine”, which as you may well know, is toxic liquid industrial radioactive waste which threatens health by high levels of radium and radioisotopes that emit radiation which embeds into bones and then causes cancer and cell damage. There is radium in each of the thousands of barrels of so-called “brine” tapped from every conventional oil and gas well and also for industrialized hydraulically-fractured oil and gas wells. Passage of this bill will legalize widespread contamination and poisoning of land and water.

I have young grandchildren who play in the snow and go sledding in my front yard. They sometimes go play in their friends yard too. Snow isn’t harmful, so I don’t worry about them playing in it. If this bill were to go

through, I will have to inspect my neighbors ice melt to make sure it's not filled with radium. To protect my grandchildren, I will have to forbid them from going to neighbors houses who use this product.

I am also extremely worried about our water supply as this radium will be washed into storm drains and run into our streams. Radium is deadly for wildlife in our creeks and streams. That doesn't even consider those streams run behind houses and through neighborhoods where children play.

It is your responsibility to create legislation that protects the health of Ohioans. This bill does the exact opposite. It will make us sick. By making this radioactive waste a commodity, you now lift all testing requirements by ODNR. As a product it can be sold to anyone without their knowledge of the radium which will poison them. Remember, it isn't just our lives you will be harming, but yours and your own relatives as well and generations to come. Can you live with that?

I sincerely hope you will re-consider this bill and stop it right here.

Jennifer Madeup

Citizen of Ohio

Share your testimony with us!

While your testimony will be public record, we would love to get a sneak peak. Please [share it](#) with us and feel free to use our helpful form to formulate your ideas. You can have a copy of your answers sent to you for quick access when we have the official submission ready.

TESTIFYING IN PERSON

While we know testifying in person is impactful for the committee members, we also know that we are in a Pandemic. Testifying in person is not for everyone, but if you choose to do so, below are some helpful tips.

1. Submit your witness slip along with written testimony no later than 24 hours before the date of the hearing. (see info. above on where and how to send it).

2. When addressing the committee, address them by their position and name (i.e. "Chairperson _____, Vice Chair _____ and Ranking Minority Member _____")
3. Arrive 45 minutes to 1 hour before the time of the hearing.
4. Practice your testimony so you are comfortable with it.
5. Expect the committee members to ask questions. The answer "I don't know" is a perfectly wonderful response sometimes. Redirecting to your point is also appropriate.

HOW TO RECORD & SUBMIT YOUR TESTIMONY

Recordings are not allowed at this time.

TALKING POINTS AND ANALYSIS

For talking points, analysis and countering claims, see our [Talking Points Toolkit](#). It can be helpful to use the analysis to help you pick one topic you want to write about.