

A photograph of the Colorado State Capitol building, featuring a prominent yellow-gold dome and a portico with columns. An American flag is visible in front of the building. The image is partially overlaid by a dark blue vertical bar on the right side.

# **CCLP'S GUIDE TO COMMUNITY TESTIMONY**

How to tell your story  
and become a  
changemaker through  
Colorado's legislative  
process

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## About Colorado Center on Law and Policy

Colorado Center on Law and Policy is a non-profit advocacy organization dedicated to the vision that every Coloradan should have what they need to succeed. Standing with diverse communities, organizations, and individuals, we are but one piece of the rising movement to fight poverty across our state. We serve our fellow Coloradans using the powers of legal advocacy, legislative advocacy, coalition building, community engagement, research, and analysis.

We depend upon the generosity of individuals to continue our fight against poverty in Colorado. Visit [copolicy.org/donate](http://copolicy.org/donate) to support our work.

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## Acknowledgement

This guide to community testimony is inspired by and built out of materials previously developed by Soul2Soul Sisters, a grassroots, loved-based, racial justice nonprofit organization based in Denver. Soul2Soul Sisters transforms Colorado and beyond through Black Women & femme-centered programming focused on Black healing, health & joy, Black civic engagement & policy, ending anti-Black racism & white supremacy culture, and reparations. Learn more at [soul2soulsisters.org](https://soul2soulsisters.org).

## Legal notice

This guide is not legal advice. This guide is for general information only. This guide was prepared for Colorado’s 2024 legislative session, and information in this guide may not be the most up-to-date legal or other information at the time you read it.

## So, you want to testify!

That's amazing! Testifying is an important way for any member of the public to get involved in the legislative process and shape the bills that become laws in our state. When you testify, you explain an issue and let legislators know how a bill will impact real people. Testimony from people affected by the issue is particularly important to the legislative process. This kind of testimony helps to form a human connection between a legislator and a bill and can break through what might seem like a lot of “legal-ese” and paid “expert” opinions. Human connection is what inspires action from legislators!

➤ *Remember: YOU are the expert on the subject because YOU have lived it!*

### Getting started

Any member of the public may provide testimony to Colorado's legislature. You can testify in support of a bill, or against a bill, or even for or against a part of a bill — also known as an “amend” position.

Each bill is assigned to a committee, which is a smaller group of legislators assigned to review all bills within a particular topic. Examples of committees include the Senate Finance Committee, or the House Judiciary Committee. Testimony from the

An “amendment” is a change to a part of the wording of a bill. Amendments must be voted on, and members of the public can testify for or against amendments, too!

public is provided at the committee level, in what is called a “committee hearing.”

You can provide your testimony in three ways:

1. **In person**, at the Capitol building in Denver
2. **Remotely**, on your computer or phone via Zoom
3. Through **written testimony** submitted to Colorado’s legislative website

➤ *Before you can testify, you will need to sign up on the Colorado General Assembly website. You may find the current sign-up link and other resources at [copolicy.org/testimony](https://copolicy.org/testimony).*

### How to sign up

**Step 1:** Select how you would like to testify, either in person, remotely via Zoom, or by submitting written testimony.

**Step 2:** Find the bill you would like to testify on. The easiest way (unless you know the bill sponsor) is to choose the first option, “By Committee and Hearing Item.”

### Testifying In Person

- By Committee and Hearing Item
- By Hearing Item
- By Sponsor and Bill

### Committee Name

Select a Committee

### Meeting Date and Time

Select meeting Date and Time

### Hearing Item

Select a hearing item

You will need to know the name of the committee, the day, and the time of your committee hearing. You can find that information at <https://leg.colorado.gov/bills> by typing in the bill number or a keyword in the search bar.



**Step 3:** Once you have selected your bill from the list of “Hearing Items,” you will be asked to fill out your name, pronouns, and contact information. Where it asks if you are representing an organization or yourself, mark “yourself.” For your “Position on the Hearing Item,” select if you are “for” or “against” the bill you want to testify on. (And if you are testifying in favor of or against an amendment to the bill, select “Amend.”)

**Step 4:** Click “Sign Up” to complete the form. Once you have signed up, you will receive a confirmation email from the Colorado General Assembly. If you are testifying remotely via Zoom, you will receive the Zoom meeting link as well.

## Drafting your testimony

To make your testimony as effective as possible, it's a good idea to draft what you want to say before you say it.

Aim to make your testimony:

- Personal — Talk about your own experience.
- Informative — Talk about specifics. What happened, and what was the outcome?
- Persuasive — How does this issue affect you? Why is your position on the bill important?
- Concise — Keep it short! You'll only have 2-3 minutes to testify. (We suggest you aim for 2!)

### Tips for effective testimony

- Prepare
  - Be sure to practice your testimony ahead of time.
  - Consider the key points you want to share.
- Be specific
  - What are the specific barriers or problems you are experiencing?
  - How are these challenges impacting you or your community?
- Propose action-based solutions
  - What could legislators do to improve these barriers?
  - Provide creative solutions that can help solve the problem.

- Stay Focused
  - Try to avoid unnecessary details.
  - Present your key points in a clear way.

➤ *Find more resources on storytelling at [copolicy.org/testimony!](https://copolicy.org/testimony/)*

### **Here is an example outline for testimony:**

1. Greet the committee
2. Introduce yourself
3. State your position (“I support House Bill XXXX/Senate Bill XXX”)
4. Back your position with facts and data
5. Share your story
6. Restate and emphasize your position
7. Make your ask (“vote yes on HB-XXXX/SB-XXX”)
8. Thank the committee

### **Example testimony template:**

It is important to use proper protocol in addressing the committee chair and other members. The following template can be used to draft testimony on any bill.



Mr./Madam Chair \_\_\_\_\_ and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, I am representing \_\_\_\_\_ (if not applicable, say “myself”), and I am here to support/oppose \_\_\_\_\_ (bill number).

(Insert testimony here.)

Thank you for your time and I welcome any questions you may have.

### **Telling your story**

As a community member with lived experience to share, the most important part of your testimony is telling your personal story. Legislators want to know how real people are affected by — or will be affected by — the issue at hand. Some things to consider as you draft testimony:

- What challenges have I or my loved ones faced?
- How has the issue impacted me or my loved ones?
- How did I deal with the issue?
- How would this bill have changed the outcome for better or worse?

## Day of the hearing

Colorado's General Assembly enforces a Code of Conduct for public hearings. This code of conduct is intended to ensure an orderly, civil process, without disruption or undue influence.

### **“Undue influence”**

means unfairly pressuring someone to do something they might not want to do.

### Decorum & Attire

It is inappropriate to cheer, boo, talk, or applaud in a committee meeting. Rallies, protests, and demonstrations in committee meetings are not allowed. This applies to virtual Zoom meetings as well.

Dress in appropriate, professional attire. Remember: you are not only representing yourself, but the position you are urging legislators to take on the bill, too!

➤ *Find the current code of conduct at [copolicy.org/testimony](https://copolicy.org/testimony)*

### Opposing testifiers

There may be people testifying who argue against what you feel or have experienced. They may say hurtful or untrue things. You aren't allowed to respond, but please don't take their opinions to heart! You know what you are fighting for!

### Note!

Legislators may be looking at their phones while you testify or be generally distracted. Ignore them! The legislators that are engaged are the ones you are trying to reach. You are still making an important record. Your story matters!

## If you are coming in person

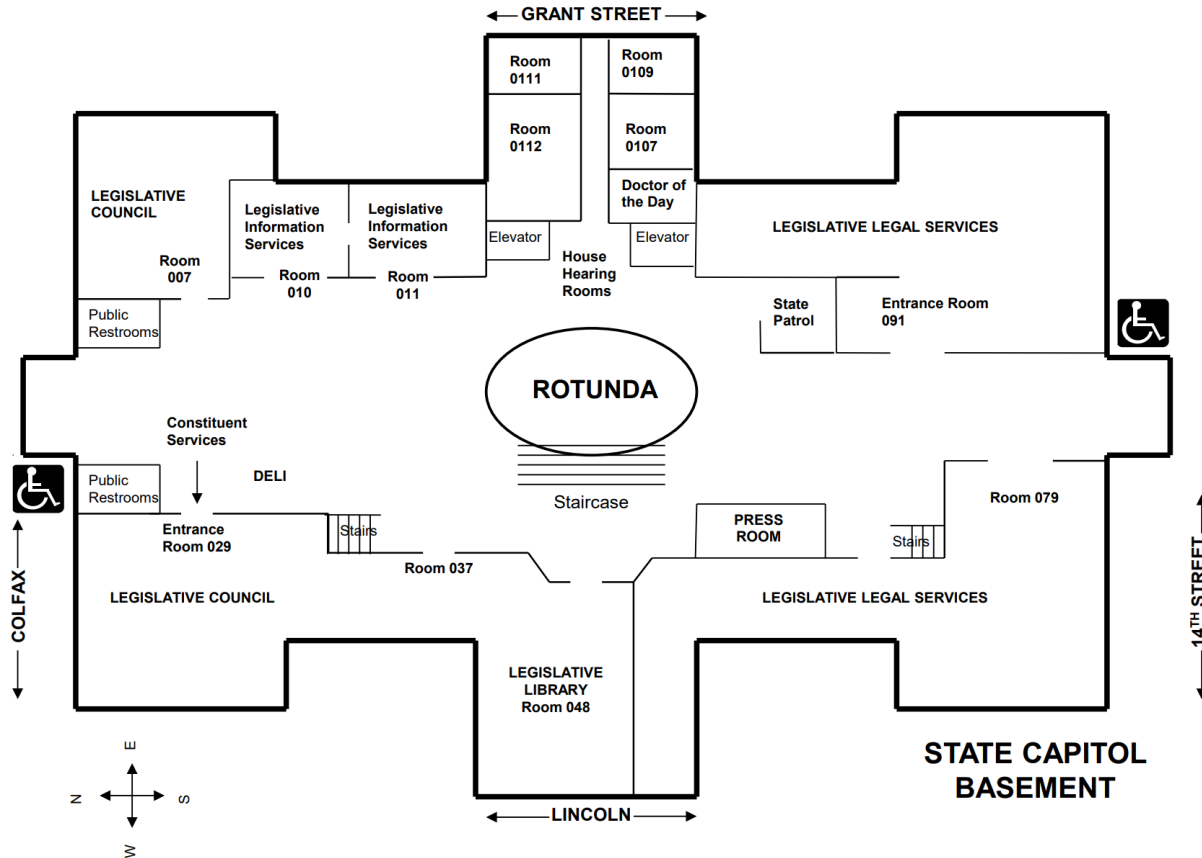
We recommend arriving early to figure out where you need to go.

Committees in the Senate and House meet in several spaces within the Capitol Complex, including the main Capitol building at 200 E Colfax Avenue, Denver, CO, 80203, and in the Legislative Services Building (LSB), located at 200 E. 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue, just south of the Capitol.

➤ *Find a link to maps of the Capitol at [copolicy.org/testimony](https://copolicy.org/testimony).*

You can find your committee's location by searching for the bill number on the [General Assembly Bill Search](#). Once on the bill's specific page, scroll below "Bill Text." If the bill is scheduled, "Upcoming Schedule" will provide you with the date, time, location, and committee.

There are television monitors in the Committee Room Hallways that provide updated information on when, where, and in what order the bill will be heard in committee.



For the main Capitol building, there are two entrances available for visitors. You can enter the building on the north side (Colfax Avenue) at the top of the stairs, or on the south side through the ADA (wheelchair accessible) ground-level entrance at 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

You will be required to go through security before entering the Capitol, so give yourself plenty of time before your testimony. Security measures include putting personal items in a bin and scanning them through an x-ray machine, passing through a metal detector, and physical search or x-ray scan of bags and packages. This is standard protocol for everyone — no need to be nervous!

There may be a lot of waiting around. If you need to grab a bite to eat or a drink, there is a deli and a cafeteria area in the basement. There are also public restrooms in the basement.

### Info desk

If you are not sure where to go next and are not being met by someone to show you, the security team at the southside entrance can direct you to the Information Desk, which is located upstairs on the first floor, and they can also tell you which elevator to take. The staff at the Information Desk are informative and approachable.

The Information Desk will have information about where each committee is meeting and where different rooms are located if you do not already have that information. The staff there can also direct you to the restrooms, cafeteria, and other public areas.

Sometimes committee schedules get off track. You can use the [CO Display Boards](#) to find the live day-of schedule for any bill(s) you may be testifying on.

### In the committee room

Once in the committee room, you will be sitting in chairs in the audience until it's your turn to testify. A committee person will call you up to the front to testify. When you go up, you can bring your written testimony with you, and leave your personal items at your seat. You will likely be on a panel of people testifying, typically two to five people at a time.

When it is your turn to testify, you will be called up to the testifying area. If you are asked to stand at a podium, there will be a timer on it along with a microphone. It is important to make sure that the microphone is turned on, and that it is at the right height for you. If you need any assistance with the microphone, you can ask someone sitting nearby to assist you. Many individuals who are testifying may have challenges with the microphone, so try not to worry about it — you can watch others as they turn on the microphone.

If public testimony is done in a panel setting, there should be a microphone in front of each seat on the panel, and a timer that is visible on the table as well. Before you begin speaking, make sure your microphone is on and a comfortable distance from your mouth so that your voice is clear. We recommend you have your prepared notes or testimony ready to read or to look at in advance.

#### Here are some guidelines for how testimony will go:

- The Chair of the committee will call you and other people on the panel up to speak.
- They will ask you to state your name, who you represent, and proceed with your comments.
- State your name, if you are speaking on behalf of an organization, and your stance: “I support (or oppose) House Bill XXXX/Senate Bill XXX.”
- You will read your testimony aloud.

- The committee may ask you questions, though it is not likely. They tend to save questions for policy experts. But if you are asked a question, and you don't know the answer, that's ok! Just say that you don't know.
- If a committee member asks you any questions, they will call on you directly. If you are asked a question, you must be called upon to respond by the Chair before you reply.
  - Ex. "Thank you Mr./Madam Chair..."
- After all the panelists have given testimony and responded to questions, the Chair will dismiss you.

After giving your testimony, you may leave the hearing. You may also stay for the rest of the hearing and find out how the committee votes!

### Virtual testimony

Sometimes you may need to present your testimony virtually. Colorado's legislature allows people to testify remotely via Zoom. To testify virtually, you must first register on the same website as you would for other forms of testimony. After you register, you will receive the link to join a Zoom meeting.

➤ *If you plan to testify via Zoom, please be sure to [watch this video!](#)*

### Zoom etiquette

When providing testimony virtually, allow yourself enough time to sign-in and test your audio and microphone. Be sure you are in a quiet room, free of distractions, with an appropriate background.

Remember that you are on camera, so dress and act as you would if you were physically present.

### IT Desk

Information Technology (IT) staff are available if you are having trouble. You can open a helpdesk ticket by calling (303) 866-5849 or by emailing [ithelp.ga@coleg.gov](mailto:ithelp.ga@coleg.gov). For general IT related questions, email [lis.ga@coleg.gov](mailto:lis.ga@coleg.gov). If you are having difficulty with signing up to testify, or with submitting written testimony, please email [committees.lsc.ga@coleg.gov](mailto:committees.lsc.ga@coleg.gov), or call (303) 866-3521.



## What happens next

After hearing all the testimony, the committee will vote on the bill.

If it passes, the bill will then move on to the House or Senate Floor. This is where all the representatives will debate and then vote on the bill. If the bill passes the first chamber (House of Representatives or the Senate), then it will move on to the other chamber, where the process starts all over again. In some cases, the bill could also go to another committee like Appropriations or Finance.

If it passes through all those steps in both the House and the Senate, then the bill will move to the governor for consideration of signing the bill into law!

### Tracking bill process

1. You can always track the progress of a bill by searching for it on the Colorado General Assembly site [leg.colorado.gov/bills](http://leg.colorado.gov/bills).
2. Once you find your bill, click on its link, and scroll to the bottom of the bill page until you reach “Status.” There you can see the status of the bill, bill history, committee information, and more.

## That's it!

That's all there is to it! Testifying in front of Colorado's legislators can feel daunting the first time you do it. But in the end, telling your story is a critical part of the legislative process. By taking part, you will help legislators make better laws for Coloradans. (And if you're testifying with CCLP, you'll have lots of help along the way!)

*Speaking of help:* You can find links to sign up for testimony, information on how to write your testimony, how to navigate the Capitol, and much more on CCLP's website. Visit [copolicy.org/testimony](https://copolicy.org/testimony) to find the complete set of resource links.