

Why give testimony?

Giving testimony is a powerful way to influence policies that affect our children. It allows public officials to listen to concerns they may not be aware of directly from the community. Most public officials appreciate and welcome the insights of parents and the community on issues that are important. The most effective testimony is typically 2-3 minutes and easily understandable by a wide range of people. A clear and concise message that successfully addresses a problem is more likely to be listened to than a long lecture on the inadequacies of the community.

Tips and Guidelines

Identify one aspect of your experience(s) that you can use to create a memorable verbal snapshot.

- Although it's ok to start with something personal, the strongest testimony ties one experience to a larger issue that policy makers can act on.
- **Effective:** *When I found out that my child was in a school with no functioning water fountain I was devastated. This district needs to work to ensure that each school has clean water for children to drink.*
- **Ineffective:** My child is as good as everyone else's child. She needs to have drinking water and you all are wrong to not provide it.

Have a clear message

- Make sure there is a clear connection between your story and the policy or practice that you want to change.
- **Effective:** I constantly worry about my child not having clean water at schools. Clean, functional water fountains are a necessity at every school to ensure all schoolchildren.
- **Ineffective:** Sometimes my child comes home with a sick stomach because of dirty water. You need to find a way to make schools cleaner and better for my child. (Think of how this problem can be resolved. Be specific if you can).

Keep your audience in mind

- Make sure that the message in your story is interesting and relevant to the audience who will hear it.
- Ask yourself the question, "What can [the SRC, City Council, Pennsylvania House Education Committee, etc.] do to address my issue?".
- **Effective:** [To City Council]: Funding from the City for public schools has not increased in years and the current need is greater than ever.
- **Ineffective:** [To the SRC]: Because our kids are suffering for inadequate resources, the SRC should put more funding into public schools. (Know the roles of the institutions you are addressing).

Share your passion

- The more expressive you are, the more you will engage your audience and the more compelling and effective your story will be.
- Be sure to remain professional and respectful at all times.
- **Effective:** When I walked into this building, I saw numerous water fountains readily available for employees. Why must my children suffer with dirty or no water while adults in this building are safe?
- **Ineffective:** The schools my children go to are in terrible shape, and the District is a mess. You should all be fired.

Before you arrive

- See sample testimony from PCCY at http://pccy.org/?page=Testimony_89(link will be updated on new website).
- **PRACTICE** speaking your testimony out loud in front of others.
- Bring enough copies of your testimony for every public official that will hear you.