

## Helpful tips and structure to craft your testimony:

Legislators appreciate concise and prepared testimony. A little preparation goes a long way when it comes to crafting your testimony. Below is a format you can follow to help you feel prepared, professional, and follow the standard procedure expected for public record testimony. Remember, you will be reading this aloud, so write your testimony in a way that flows easily for your speaking cadence. And don't worry, if the nerves set in, you can read your testimony directly from what you have written. And if you testify on Zoom, it will be audio only.

1. You'll start your testimony with a **greeting**.
2. **Address the chair of the committee, followed by recognizing the committee's other members. (You must always speak through the chair and be recognized by the chair to speak or submit materials for the committee/the record.)**
3. For the record, **you must spell your last name** and if you are authorized/or speaking on behalf of an organization or company, state the name of the org or company you represent. If you are just testifying as yourself, state the county and city or town you reside in.
4. Next, you'll want to **note which bill you are testifying on and state your position on it, asking the committee to take that action**.
  - a. Position will be either support or oppose the bill.
  - b. In the committee hearing structure, all proponents speak first, then all opponents speak second.
5. Next, and most importantly, you need to **share the story of how this bill impacts and connects to you and/or your community. Include facts about the issue and establish your point with trusted sources**. Your story will have the most impact with legislators. Lobbyists and legislative staff are there to help legislators dig into the policy language. Your why is what they need to hear. You don't need to be an expert on the policy itself – just be the expert of your own experience.
  - a. If you want help crafting your story, utilize our worksheet to build your advocacy pitch.
  - b. When crafting your why, state it clearly and avoid acronyms and industry jargon that legislators may not be familiar with. Do not assume that the committee members know the detailed ins and outs of agricultural operations or family farms.
  - c. While listening to people testify before you, if they have stated points that you agree with or were planning to also state, do not be repetitive to those points in deep detail. Just state that you agree with those points, and move to the next part of your testimony/story.

- d. In some situations, the Chair of the committee may limit the length of testimony to 1-3 minutes per person. Having a shortened version of your testimony that hits the bones of the issue is helpful.
6. Conclude your testimony. Restate your position on the bill and thank the committee for their time and consideration of the issue.

Example of testimony following the above structure:

Good morning Mr. Chair and members of the House Agriculture Committee. My name is Rachel Prevost, spelled P-R-E-V-O-S-T, and I reside in Cascade County. I am a member of Montana Farmers Union. Today I urge you to support SB 537. Incentivizing retail shelf space for Montana products through this tax incentive will be a great opportunity for family farmers and ranchers. Currently, there is very little market access due to large corporations controlling the shelf space in Montana grocery stores. It's important that Montana producers can compete in the market and that Montana consumers have more choice in what they spend their food dollar on. As a beef producer, having more local market opportunities creates more opportunity for me in return to keep dollars in our local economy. I strongly urge you to support SB 537 so Montana family farmers and ranchers have more market access. Thank you for your consideration and time, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Check out this example hearing from last session to see it all in action: <https://sg001-harmony.sliq.net/00309/Harmony/en/PowerBrowser/PowerBrowserV2/20170221/-1/47085?agendaId=267699>

Want to dive even deeper on Advocacy 101? Watch for MFU Webinar and helpful tips! Feel free to check out this Grow MT toolkit as well: <https://growmt.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Grow-MT-Advocacy101.pdf>