

# HOW TO TESTIFY



**Testifying as an expert and a constituent before a legislative body is an exciting opportunity to share specialized knowledge and influence lawmakers' decisions. Within the context of the Zero Food Waste Coalition, testifying on behalf of your own organization is a great way to advocate for policy change and make a difference in the way our country addresses food waste. This document highlights ZFWC members who have testified and equips readers with the skills and knowledge needed to testify.**

## TESTIFYING ADVICE FROM ZFWC MEMBERS:

"Testifying isn't that different from many other speaking engagements, plus you get to have your notes in front of you. Remember that these people hear a lot of different issues, so make a simple, clear, concise case. It's also good to know that often when they are asking questions, it can be more about their political grandstanding than the question itself. You don't have to answer directly. Just emphasize the points you want to get on the record in your answer."

■ Dana Gunders, ReFED

"A little preparation can go a long way! You may only be able to speak for 2 minutes, or perhaps just "I am in support of this bill." But your input on the policy's impact is a crucial element of our democratic process."

■ Andrea Collins, NRDC

"Recognize the value of your unique perspective and voice. Don't worry about delivering a perfectly polished testimony—just speak from the heart and share your authentic point of view. No testimony is too short; even 2–3 clear, meaningful sentences can make a real impact. Remember that everyone in the room was new at one point, and most people are receptive if you ask questions or seek guidance. Bring patience and persistence—it can take years to pass legislation, but if you believe in the cause, the time investment is worth it, even when the process feels repetitive. And lastly, don't forget snacks and water—you may be waiting several hours before it's your turn to speak!"

■ Dana Siles, RI Food Policy Council and National Food Recovery Association

## PREPARE TO TESTIFY

*Preparation for testifying is crucial to ensure clarity, credibility, and confidence. Key steps include reviewing facts, anticipating questions, practicing delivery, and understanding procedures.*

### Identify Opportunities to Testify

- Use Divert's Food Waste Legislative Tracker linked [HERE](#) to monitor proposed food waste prevention, rescue, and recycling bills in your state and track how the bill has progressed across chambers and committees.

### Navigate to Your State Legislature's Website

- State websites will often allow you to search for bills, find your legislators, discover committees, and locate meeting schedules and agendas.
- Understanding your audience (the committee members) can better help you anticipate what questions they may ask you.

### Understand the Legislative Process

- Familiarize yourself with the procedures of the legislative body before which you will testify. This includes knowing the committee's jurisdiction, the bill's status, and the hearing format.

### Research the Bill

- Analyze the bill's text to comprehend its provisions. Identify how the bill aligns with your organization's mission and the broader goals of reducing food waste.

### Gather Supporting Data

- Collect relevant statistics that could help you describe how the bill will impact your work to emphasize the bill's significance. Concrete evidence enhances the credibility of your testimony.

### Sign Up

- It is possible that you may need to sign up to testify. Check the testifying resources on your state legislature's website so you don't miss the window to sign up to speak.

"Good lobbying involves working with the sponsors and committee before the committee hearing. Testimony is to support the conversations with legislators that have occurred leading up to the hearing. That is why, if you want an amendment to a bill to be added in a hearing, it is crucial to have conversations with the sponsor and the committee prior to the hearing. The sponsor or a committee member may agree to bringing the amendment up and your testimony then supports their decision. Also, if you've engaged before the hearing, when you show up to testify about a bill that you don't like or want changed, you can tell the other elected members that you have tried to be part of the process leading up to the hearing."

- Rachel Setzke, EcoCycle

## WRITE YOUR TESTIMONY

*Communicating your points clearly and persuasively involves organizing facts, aligning with legal or policy goals, using plain language, and reviewing for accuracy and impact.*

### Structure

- All testimonies tend to follow a repeatable structure: an introduction (name, affiliation), a position (whether you support or oppose the bill), supporting evidence (data or personal experience), and a clear ask (what action you want the legislative body to take).

### Time Constraints

- Keep in mind that you will likely have time constraints when delivering testimony and you should aim at getting to the point right away.

### Use Accessible Language

- Avoid jargon and technical terms that may not be familiar to all committee members. A friend who does not work in the same field as you should be able to understand what you are advocating for.

## DELIVER YOUR TESTIMONY

*This is the moment we've been waiting for! Delivering testimony is empowering and should not be intimidating when you've done the prep work. Keep your remarks clear, concise, and focused on your key message. Speak from your experience, stick to the time limit, and don't be afraid to show your passion. Remember- you are the expert!*

### Practice Speaking Slowly

- The worst-case scenario is that your testimony is not clearly received. Practice aloud, slow down, raise your volume, and pace yourself.

### Print Your Testimony

- Print out your testimony using a bigger font than you usually use and double space so that it is easier for you to keep your place.

### Thank the Committee

- Thank the committee for the opportunity to present your testimony, and for hearing your position.

**Testifying may feel intimidating at first, but as someone working to reduce food waste, your voice is helping lawmakers understand the real-world impact of food policy decisions. Lean on fellow coalition members to amplify your message, coordinate support, and show up in numbers around key legislation. Whether you're testifying in person, submitting written comments, or simply making a call, your advocacy matters. Stay engaged, stay vocal, and never hesitate to reach out. Your passion and expertise can drive real change!**