



Legislative Council Staff

Nonpartisan Services for Colorado's Legislature

Memorandum

Room 029 State Capitol, Denver, CO 80203-1784

Phone: (303) 866-3521 • Fax: (303) 866-3855

lcs.ga@state.co.us • leg.colorado.gov/lcs

March 2, 2021

TO: Interested Persons

FROM: Elizabeth Burger, Deputy Director, 303-866-6272

SUBJECT: Public Participation in the Legislative Process

Summary

Legislative committees are a very important part of Colorado's legislative process. At a legislative committee hearing, citizens have an opportunity to express their views and have them incorporated into the official legislative record. In Colorado, every bill receives a public hearing by one of the legislature's committees. This memorandum provides guidance to the public in participating in the legislative process.

Role of a Committee

The Colorado State Constitution requires that every bill be heard on its merits. When a bill is introduced in either the Senate or the House, it is sent to a [Committee of Reference](#) comprised of 5 to 13 legislators for review and public comment. The committee determines if the proposal should go forward in the legislature. After the committee considers any proposed amendments, it may vote to favorably recommend the bill to the Committee of the Whole, refer the bill to another committee, or postpone the bill indefinitely.

Committee schedules. When the legislature is in session, committees generally meet as determined by the established committee schedule. However, committees will occasionally meet in different rooms at varying times to accommodate a large audience or remote testimony. Monday mornings (typically 10:00 a.m. until noon) and Friday mornings (typically 9:00 a.m. until noon) are reserved for floor work. Committees with hearings in the morning meet from Upon Adjournment of floor work until noon. At the chair's discretion, morning committees may also meet from 7:30 a.m. until 9:00 a.m. Afternoon committees generally meet at 1:30 p.m. Click [here](#) for links to the committees' schedules and membership lists for the 2021 legislative session.

Tracking a Bill

Online bill information. The full text of bills, resolutions, and memorials, and their history, votes, fiscal notes, and committee reports are available [online](#). Bills are named according to the house where they were introduced and the year. For example, Senate Bill 21-001 is the name of the first bill introduced in the Senate during the 2021 legislative session. Click [here](#) for an explanation of the bill names, or versions, based on where they are in the legislative process. The [House](#) and [Senate](#) bill status sheets are used to track legislation as it moves through the General Assembly.

Bill scheduling. The chair of each committee determines when a bill will be heard. The [House](#) and [Senate](#) daily calendars show the scheduled committee hearings and calendared bills. Both the full House and Senate meet in their respective chambers daily during session, generally at 10:00 a.m. on Mondays, and at 9:00 a.m. Tuesday through Friday. Changes to the published calendar are announced during these floor sessions and tweeted [@COLCSCcommittees](#).

Online Video and Audio Resources

The House and Senate live floor proceedings are available in audio and video format on the [Watch and Listen page](#) of the General Assembly's website. Live audio broadcasts of committee hearings, as well as archived floor and committee recordings, are also available on this page. Live audio for floor and committee sessions can also be accessed through the daily [session schedule](#).

Public Participation in Committee of Reference Hearings During the Public Health Disaster Emergency

During the declared public health disaster emergency, the General Assembly is offering additional options for members of the public to participate in committee of reference hearings. Members of the public may participate in the committee process by:

- submitting written testimony;
- testifying via Webex, from anywhere in the state; or
- testifying in person.

All three options require members of the public to register on the General Assembly's public testimony website: leg.colorado.gov/testimony.

For all three options, registration is only available for bills that have been scheduled for a committee hearing. If a bill is not available for registration, the bill is not currently scheduled for a committee hearing. At times, a bill may be scheduled for a committee hearing just prior to the start of its hearing. In this case, you may need to monitor the bill's status on the General Assembly's website and refresh the testimony registration page once the bill has been scheduled for a committee hearing.

Witness lists are public records under the Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) and can be provided to any person upon request.

Written testimony. During the declared public health disaster emergency, members of the public may submit written testimony on bills scheduled for committee hearings. Written testimony is a public record under the Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) and will be included in the staff summary of each meeting, which is posted on the General Assembly's website.

To register, visit leg.colorado.gov/testimony, and select the "Submit Written Testimony" option. You may either upload a prepared document or use the space provided (max 1500 characters) to type your submission. The option to submit written testimony becomes available when a bill is scheduled for a hearing in a committee of reference and lasts until the committee takes action on the bill.

In addition to submitting written testimony, you may also testify remotely (see "Remote Testimony") or in-person (see "Testify in Person").

Remote testimony. During the declared public health disaster emergency, members of the public may testify remotely on bills during committee of reference hearings, via the web conferencing software Webex. Members of the public may testify remotely from any location in the state.

Advanced registration is required, and witnesses may begin registering at the time the bill is scheduled for a committee hearing. Registration will close with the bill's hearing begins. To register, visit leg.colorado.gov/testimony, and select the "Testify via Webex" option. After you have registered, you will receive a confirmation e-mail with the Webex link.

Prior to participating remotely, you should familiarize yourself with Webex and test your computer's audio-video settings. It is best to use the [desktop application](#) for Webex instead of connecting using a browser.

When it is time for the committee hearing, log onto Webex using the link in your confirmation email.

For best results:

- be sure to use the same email address to sign in to Webex that you used when registering;
- limit internet usage for other applications or devices (such as streaming services), as this will slow down internet speeds and disrupt your Webex connection;
- use wired headphones or a USB headset to eliminate audio loops and feedback;
- avoid the use of Bluetooth audio headsets, which often work better with cellular phones than computers; and
- use the "Dial-In" feature for your audio if your connection is unstable, using the phone number that you submitted when registering.

Multiple bills may be heard during a committee hearing; the same Webex link is used for the entirety of a committee hearing. Therefore, it is possible you will join the Webex conference before the bill on which you wish to testify is before the committee. To monitor committee proceedings, please visit leg.state.co.us/public/display.nsf/index.html.

The House of Representatives and Senate have issued regulations regarding remote public testimony, which can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Instead of testifying remotely, you may testify in-person (see "In-person Testimony"). You may also submit written testimony (see "Written Testimony").

In-person testimony. Witnesses wishing to testify in person on a bill in a committee of reference must register. Registration is only available on the day of a bill's scheduled committee hearing and opens at the following times:

- for bills scheduled in committees meeting upon adjournment of the House or Senate floor session - **8:30 a.m.;**
- for bills scheduled in committees meeting in the afternoon - **one hour prior to the scheduled committee meeting time.**

Registration will close when the committee chair ends the public testimony portion of the bill hearing.

To register, visit leg.colorado.gov/testimony, and select the "In Person" option.

Instead of testifying in person, you may testify remotely (see "Remote Testimony"). You may also submit written testimony (see "Submit Written Testimony").

Committee Protocol

The purpose of a committee hearing is to gather information so that the committee can make an informed recommendation on a given bill or resolution. Public input is an important part of this process. As elected officials, committee members appreciate hearing the perspective of citizens and organizations on issues.

Preparing to testify. When preparing your testimony, plan to present in less than three minutes. Many committee chairs time witnesses, and will ask you to conclude your testimony if you exceed the amount of time they have designated for testimony.

Testifying. The order of bills to be heard is posted in the daily calendars and on the committee's webpage. The order can also be found on the committee proceedings website: leg.state.co.us/public/display.nsf/index.html. The chair will announce each bill, after which the bill's sponsor will address the committee. The chair may then ask for testimony from proponents and opponents. Hearings are conducted using formal parliamentary procedure. You may find the following recommendations to be helpful.

- Begin your presentation by stating, "Mr. or Madam Chair ____, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. My name is ____, representing ____, and I am here to support/oppose this bill because . . ."
- Do not read your testimony word for word.

- Be brief and avoid repeating what other witnesses have said. Try to focus on points that have not been mentioned.
- At the end of your testimony, thank the committee members and offer to answer any questions.
- If a member asks a question, wait for the chair to prompt you, then state your name followed by, "Chair ___, Senator/Representative ___, the answer to your question is . . ." If you do not know the answer, it is always okay to say that you do not know. If you promise to follow-up, be sure to do so in a timely manner.
- Do not be offended if committee members come and go during a hearing. They have other commitments, including the presentation of bills in other committees that are meeting simultaneously.
- At a hearing with a large number of witnesses, there may not be time for everyone to testify.
- Cell phones and other electronic devices should be on a silent setting.
- Food and beverages are prohibited in the committee rooms.
- The chair has the discretion and authority to limit testimony, ask the sergeant-at-arms to remove a disruptive person from the committee room, and clear the public from any hearing in the event of a disturbance that is disruptive to legislative proceedings.
- Disruptive witnesses testifying remotely will be disconnected from the Webex conference.

Contacting a Legislator

Contact information for every legislator, including his or her office phone number, e-mail address, and committee assignments, is located in the [legislative directory](#). Witnesses may directly contact members of the legislature to share their views on pending legislation. Comments sent to individual legislators do not become part of the public record.