

Make Your Voice Heard

How To Testify For Trans Rights

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It is incredibly important for people in power to hear from those who are directly impacted by the laws and policies of our government. Our stories matter. Our voices matter. As a trans person or an ally, you may have the opportunity to speak in front of state legislatures, school boards, city councils, and more. This guide walks you through the essential building blocks of telling your story in these settings.

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What is Public Testimony?

Public testimony is a formal statement given by an individual, community group, or organization before a policymaker or group of policymakers like city councils, school boards, state legislatures, and Congress. Usually, testimony highlights personal experiences, expertise, and data in support or opposition of a proposed law or policy. When it comes to advocating for trans rights, using your voice and providing testimony can be a powerful tool to create change.



Things to Do Before Testifying

- ☐ **Know what bill, resolution, or ordinance you are testifying for.** Take the time to read the bill and see what your local organizations are saying. What is the bill about? What are the consequences of the bill if it is or isn't passed, and how do you want legislator(s) to vote on it?
- ☐ **Find out when and where your bill(s) or policies will be heard.** Check out your policymakers' hearing schedules to find out when.
- ☐ **Research what you need to prepare and do in order to provide public testimony.** Will you be providing testimony written, virtually, or in-person? Some helpful things to know include, but are not limited to:
 - ☐ How much time will you have to testify?
 - ☐ Is there a word limit for any written testimony?
 - ☐ Where will the hearing take place?
 - ☐ What will parking be like?
 - ☐ Will you have to go through security?
 - ☐ Is there anything you can't bring into the building?

For state legislatures, you should be able to find all of this information on their website. The same should be true for city councils and school boards, but you may also need to check social media or get on their email list for the most up-to-date information.

- ☐ **Take some time to research and learn more about the committee members who will be present at the hearing.** Learning more about committee members and their potential stance can help you craft your testimony and/or better prepare for any questions from anti-trans lawmakers.
- ☐ **Write out your testimony.** Make sure that it meets any testimony requirements.
- ☐ **Practice!** Practice your remarks to make sure it meets the time limit, and to build more confidence ahead of the hearing. You got this!
- ☐ **Print out a couple of hard copies to bring with you to the hearing.** You might want to make last minute changes to your testimony on-site, and it helps if you can take notes on paper. We also recommend providing your testimony to committee members for the official record!
- ☐ **Dress appropriately!** If possible, dress professionally. Business casual is usually appropriate. Bring a mask to wear to protect the community, and to give you more anonymity when testifying.

Prepare Your Message

1. **Introduce yourself.** Tell them your name, where you're from, and about your roots in the community. This can be short and simple. Be as specific as you can without putting your safety at risk. If you feel safer with fewer identifying details, that's okay too.
2. **Lead with shared values.** Research shows that the most compelling messages start with a shared value that helps lawmakers be more open and/or audiences nodding along. We have to lead with what we believe in.

Example:

“My name is Jenny S., and I have lived in Townsville, State for [X] years. I'm speaking to you because I am a teacher in [X District], and I believe that students deserve to try new hobbies and play new sports, and to meet new friends through school activities. I believe most parents want their children to have access to as many opportunities as possible, and I believe that sports teaches young people important life lessons. This includes trans youth, who deserve our support to live their best lives.

3. **Introduce the problem.** We have to name the problem we want to fix. It's best to ask for something specific, like “vote no on this bill” or “reject this resolution that would censor LGBTQI+ books in our schools.” Be direct. Include facts and evidence to support your argument about the harms of the proposed policy, or the benefits if the policy is in support of trans people's rights. This can include both data and lived experiences. Personal stories move people!
4. **Name the solution(s).** Highlight why that particular bill would or wouldn't be the solution. Explain the impacts clearly, and avoid jargon. Be clear about who is responsible for solving problems, even if they didn't create them. For example, legislators have been elected by the community to address the community's most pressing issues. Remind them of that responsibility, and provide facts and research to back up your points.
5. **Close with a positive vision for the future.** The vision should clearly connect to your values. Strong messaging helps people understand how the world will be different if we enact the proposed solutions. Tell the legislators clearly what you want them to do. Sometimes, you're just asking them to listen to your story and to see us as human.

Example:

“I hope our legislators will choose to do the right thing to protect all youth and families, which includes trans youth. All Montanans and their families deserve the opportunity to live a life that is free, safe, and thriving.

Written Testimony Template

[Your First and Last Name]

[Name of the committee and/or agency where you are testifying]

[Date]

To [Chairperson, Lawmaker, Name of Committee, City Council, or other person you are submitting testimony to],

Paragraph 1: Introduce yourself. Share a bit about yourself, and introduce the issue you are testifying about. Lead with shared values.

Paragraph 2: Introduce the problem and tell your story

Paragraph 3: Present solutions and name the ask

Paragraph 4: Wrap up by restating your ask and your values. Remember to say thank you!

Practice below!

Example Testimony

Hello, Chairperson X and members of the Committee, my name is Alex and my pronouns are they/he. **I am a registered voter who lives in X state. I am here to testify and voice my opposition to HR 28**, the so-called “Protection of Women and Girls in Sports Act of 2025.

This bill does nothing to address any of the real concerns that women and girls face in sports. This bill targets a small group of transgender youth for unfair treatment, excluding them from vital aspects of education and exposing them to increased harassment.

Young people of all backgrounds deserve access to the proven social, mental, and physical benefits of sport. Academic research affirms that transgender women do not have any inherent advantage in sport, and we believe that all trans people deserve to play sports and do what they love. H.R. 28 bill would not only excludes kids from an important aspect of many youths’ educations, but makes them targets of hate and harassment by peers, educators, and parents.

To truly support girls and women in sports, lawmakers must address continued inequality in funding and facilities compared to men’s sports and the rampant sexual abuse targeting athletes of all genders.

Please vote no on HR 28.

Best Practices

Security

When presenting before a committee or government body, your testimony is a matter of public record. Just to be safe, you should be prepared for what might come after making a public statement in support of trans people. Given the recent rise in anti-trans extremism, it's important to be informed and prepared. Your safety comes first!

1. **Before testifying, prep your social media accounts.** Consider having your social media accounts private or locked before or after testifying to keep yourself safe from potential harm and doxxing. Altering your name or profile picture can also help keep your identity more secure.
2. **Be aware of name requirements.** If possible, avoid using your full name to keep your identity safe. Some people use the first initial of their last name, instead of their full last name.
3. **Avoid providing specific details in your testimony,** especially your workplace, your school, your healthcare providers, etc. If you're concerned about security, make sure to use more general language.
4. **Band together.** Showing up to a hearing with supportive friends and allies shows lawmakers that you're not alone, and it also keeps you safer. If you're testifying at the state capitol or city hall, remember that these are public spaces and anyone might be able to come in. Travel with a buddy or in groups to stay safe.

Public Testimony

1. **Prep ahead of time!** Use resources like the session or hearing schedules, bill trackers, etc. to track when public testimony is taking place for important bills! Research what you need to prepare and do in order to provide public testimony. This can include submitting a request to speak, identifying how much time you have for your statement, familiarizing yourself with rules of decorum. Practice your remarks to make sure it meets the time limit. Check for any last minute changes and postponements.
2. **Testifying.** Take a moment to collect yourself before speaking, and remember to breathe. Introduce your name, where you live, and any relevant personal or professional connections to the bill, but keep security considerations in mind. Reference the bill number and/or name before diving into your remarks. Share your story and how the bill might affect you and your community. Keep track of the time you are allotted. If possible, have someone take a photo or film your testimony!

3. **After Testifying.** Submit a written version of your statement for lawmakers and staff to refer back to. If you feel safe going so, help build support for your bill by posting your testimony and any photos/videos online. You can also follow up with any lawmakers or council members afterwards to keep building those relationships and push for the changes you want to see.

Virtual Testimony

- Test your lighting, audio, and technology prior to testifying.
- Review your statement ahead of time and have it near your computer's camera.
- Have your camera at eye level.
- Be mindful of your background and any possible interruptions or noise that might interfere with you testifying.
- Turn off air conditioners and heaters to avoid fan noise.

Meeting in Person

In some cases, you may be able to meet one-on-one with your lawmaker or their staff in their office. Here are some tips for how to prepare.

1. **Prep ahead of time.** Schedule a time to meet with your lawmaker. Their schedules are often full, so the sooner you reach out to schedule, the better! Research the lawmaker you are meeting with and prepare your statement. Know where you are going and decide what you want to achieve. Remember to dress appropriately for your meeting!
2. **During the Meeting.** Be prompt and patient. Be mindful of how much time you have. These can be short meetings, so make the most of it! Be polite and respectful, take detailed notes, and bring up any connections you have with the lawmaker and/or staff. Share your story, stick to your talking points, and set a deadline for any responses that you need from them.
3. **After the Meeting.** Thank each person for their time (and ask for a picture if you like!). Reach out to follow up with them, especially if they said they would follow up with you on anything you asked for. Ask for a card and any additional contact info you need to stay in touch.

Building Bridges with Lawmakers Who Might Not Agree

- Describe what being transgender means. All too often, people don't actually know what being transgender means. Explain to them what being trans means, but you don't have to address medications or surgery if you're not confident speaking about those topics.

- Normalize unfamiliarity – empathize and show it’s okay to change your mind. Remind them that there’s lots of misinformation out there, and that trans folks are living full, happy lives all across the nation.

“It can be hard to understand what it means to be trans, especially if you don’t know any trans people. I’d love to tell you more about who we are.

- Ask them questions about their stance and understand where they’re coming from.
- Name your intention to build a bridge and mutual understanding. Focus on storytelling and finding shared values.
- Connect with the broader impacts of the proposed policy. Emphasize that many policies that target trans people also impact other communities and/or issues.

Building Deeper Connections with Pro-Trans Lawmakers

- Take the time to thank them for their advocacy and/or support for specific pieces of legislation. Provide the name/number of the bill and tell them why their support was important to you.
- Come to them with potential ideas and examples for new legislation they can sponsor.
- Ask them how and if they’re building bridges with lawmakers who might be in opposition.
- Ask them if there’s anything you can do to support the work they are doing or the legislation they are hoping to pass.

Navigating Tough Questions

At some hearings, you may only have the opportunity to give your testimony. But at others, lawmakers may take the opportunity to respond to you with questions. Here are some tips to navigate tough questions.

1. **Do some research.** If you know who you might be meeting with or testifying in front of, it’s helpful to do some research ahead of time to get an idea of their stance. This can help you prepare for any questions they might ask and aim your testimony more accurately.
2. **Be respectful.** Thank the person who asked, and respond calmly. This can be hard, especially if we are engaging with anti-trans lawmakers and staff. Remember to pause, gather your thoughts, and breathe.
3. **Tell the truth and stick with what you know.** If you don’t know the answer, that is okay! It’s best to say “I don’t know” instead of accidentally providing the wrong information. You can also offer to follow up with an answer.

4. **You don't have to answer.** Unfortunately, we sometimes get asked inappropriate questions. It's okay to not answer any question you're uncomfortable with. This also includes any questions that might be irrelevant to your testimony or the legislation you are advocating for. "I'm not going to answer that question, but what I can tell you is...."
5. **Stay focused.** There may be some frustrating conversations and questions that will come up. Take some deep breaths, stay focused, and deliver the message you want to get across.

Disinformation Fighters: Pushing Back

1. **Try to avoid repeating the opposition's message.** For example, don't say "trans people are not groomers" as a response to these kinds of messages. Instead, you want to start by saying what IS true - not what isn't! "Trans people deserve the same dignity and respect as all people."
2. **Repeat the good stuff over and over.** Repeat your messaging instead of trying to rebut everything the opposition says.
3. **Know your history.** Remind people that trans folks have always been here! Trans people have gotten trans healthcare for decades. Trans people have always existed, survived, and even thrived - even under the hardest circumstances.
4. **Highlight the bigger picture.** How are lawmakers addressing the real issues? Do people actually care about what's on trans folks' IDs more than they care about getting food on the table? Make the anti-trans lawmakers the villain.
5. **Share what experts are saying.** Did you know that major medical associations believe that trans healthcare is both safe and necessary? We know that this care is lifesaving. Trans healthcare lets trans people live full, healthy lives as their true selves.
6. **Go back to values.** Emphasize those ideas of family, community, freedom, and solidarity. Talk about your ideals, and don't be afraid to talk about the big picture. What kind of school, city, or state do we want to be?