

Five Tips for Effective Public Comment

Public policy and budget decisions affect each and every one of us and our communities. Sometimes even the best decisions can have unintended effects for different members of our community. That's why it's critical that people make their voices heard. Public hearings as well as letters, emails and phone calls to your elected officials are important ways to help shape these decisions.

- 1. Be specific.** Be specific about exactly what you are asking from elected officials – know the exact name of programs, funding sources, dollar amounts or percentages. Let them know exactly what you support or oppose, and your ideas for alternative solutions.
- 2. Tell your story.** Be sure to tell elected officials why this is important to you—how does it connect to you as a person, your family, or your community? How, specifically, does it impact you, your family, someone you know, or your community?
- 3. Keep it short and simple.** Comments in public hearings are often limited to 1-2 minutes. Write your comments out ahead of time. Take time to practice and time yourself. No one wants to be cut-off before they've made their point. Once at the podium, there may be a timekeeper will hold up a sign letting you know how much time you have left and when you have to stop.
- 4. Arrive early.** Plan to arrive early in case you need to sign up. You should arrive anywhere from 20 minutes to 1 hour early, if the hearing is of great public interest or if it's anticipated that there will be a long sign-up line. Once the committee begins, individuals and groups will be asked to come to the podium to testify in the order they are listed.
- 5. Send Letters, email and phone calls.** When unable to attend public hearings, you may also schedule a meeting with your elected officials or make phone calls and emails to your elected officials are another option.

Additional Pointers for Public Hearings

- You may need to register and/or provide your name, the organization you represent, if any, and your address.
- You may need to sign up to deliver comments.
- Be prepared to adjust your presentation to the time limits, or in the event the limits contained in the board's policy are changed.
- When you come to the speaker's podium, introduce yourself and then succinctly state the purpose of your testimony; e.g., "I am Jane Doe and I am here to express my support/opposition to the suggest changes to the proposed budget plan".
- Professional and respectful behavior is expected from all participants.
- For interpreter services or other accommodations, contact the agency that is accepting public comments. There is a deadline to request interpreter services or other accommodations to be sure to contact them by the stated deadline. The deadline/requirements are usually posted on their website.