



## Grassroots Advocacy

### Tips for Testifying at Public Hearings

State and local hearings and town meetings are an opportunity to speak directly to decision-makers about how an issue affects you personally and locally. It's helpful to do some advance research to find out who's on the committee and what district they represent. Ideally, some of the advocates that testify on behalf of *RI Citizens for the Arts* are people who are voters in a committee member's district. In Rhode Island, the state legislature is part-time so most committee hearings are held in the late afternoon and early evening for greatest participation. If you plan to attend a hearing, be prepared to wait around a bit as the agenda can be packed!

- o Prior to the hearing/meeting, be sure to check the schedule/calendar for any last minute changes and postponements. *RI Citizens for the Arts* is a resource for up-to-date and timely info.
- o At the hearing/meeting, check in – you may be asked to sign in as a speaker.
- o Public forums may start with an explanation of the rules, order of speakers, etc.
- o In many cases, the moderator/committee chair calls speakers from a list. In other cases, you may need to volunteer to speak by walking up to the microphone.
- o When you stand up to speak, give yourself a moment to collect your thoughts at the microphone – don't feel rushed – this is your time. When you're ready, introduce yourself and begin.
- o Make sure to reference the correct bill number and to adapt the message points supplied by *RI Citizens for the Arts*.
- o If you're nervous – say so! It humanizes you and gets the sympathetic attention of committee members.
- o Keep it short! Make your point quickly and clearly.
- o If you are a constituent of a committee member, mention that during your introduction.

- o When you introduce yourself, include your full name, where you live, and your specific personal or professional connection to the arts and creative sector – *why you care*.
- o If you are a member of *RI Citizens for the Arts*, mention that as it will give more oomph to future *RI Citizens for the Arts* lobbying efforts if they are known for turning out people to public hearings.
- o You can usually submit written testimony to support your spoken statement. Use your written testimony for ALL of the details you wish to present. Do NOT read it to the committee!
- o Keep it personal! Show how the issue affects you, your family and friends. This is easier for people to understand than facts and figures. Use *RI Citizens for the Arts*' 'Tell Your Own Story' as a resource.
- o Keep it local! Give specific examples when you can.
- o Make eye contact and don't be afraid to use some appropriate humor if that makes you feel more comfortable.
- o Remind decision makers why you care about this issue and that you are counting on them to help.
- o Offer yourself up as a local resource if they have any questions about the points you covered in the future.

### **Bonus Points!**

Since you're going to be testifying about an issue that matters to you, consider bringing a digital camera with you and asking your lawmaker to do a quick photo-op so that you can submit the picture of the two of you to place with your local media or in an organizational newsletter about your recent advocacy on behalf of arts and creative sector. They will love it and it's good PR for you and your organization!

[www.ricitizensforarts.org](http://www.ricitizensforarts.org)