



# DC Council Testimony Guide

We have prepared the following testimony guide to help you prepare for hearings before the DC Council, such as Performance Oversight and Budget hearings.

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*Please direct all questions regarding this guide to*

*Kristin Ewing, [kewing@dcappleseed.org](mailto:kewing@dcappleseed.org)*

*Thank you to the Strengthening Families Through Behavioral Health Coalition*

*Thank you for allowing us to borrow their formatting style and content for this guide.*



# How to Testify

## To testify live (in-person or virtual):

- Go to the Council Website, click "Hearings" at the top of the page, then click "**HMS: Hearing Management System**" or go to <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/hearings>.
  - Find a hearing by scrolling chronologically through the hearings list or by looking at the calendar view. You can also filter hearings by committee using the dropdown menu at the top of the page or by entering a keyword in the search bar.
- Once you have identified a hearing you want to testify at, click on the selection. When you are brought to the hearing page, first read the **Hearing Notice** at the bottom of the page for additional details. The hearing page shows how many witnesses have already signed up under the "Witnesses" heading. Once a committee uploads a witness list for the hearing, the counter will be replaced by a link to download the witness list (typically 24 hours in advance). This will allow you to see where you fall on the list.
- Click the "**Register to Testify**" button at the upper right of the page to register to testify at the hearing. If the deadline to sign up for a hearing has already passed, or if there are no public witnesses, the button will not be available.
  - If multiple topics are to be considered at a hearing, select which one you would like to testify on by placing a checkmark next to the relevant topic or legislation.
  - If testifying on behalf of an organization, select "Organization" and include your title and the organization's name.
  - If you are testifying on your own behalf, select "Individual." A committee may include additional fields to gather further details.
  - For security purposes, you must check a reCAPTCHA box and possibly click pictures to submit your request. After completing the web form, you should receive a confirmation email from [noreply@dccouncil.gov](mailto:noreply@dccouncil.gov).
- Prior to the hearing, you will receive an email from [noreply@dccouncil.gov](mailto:noreply@dccouncil.gov) from the committee with additional details on testifying. The witness list will also be available on the hearing page before the hearing.
- More information on live testimony can be found below.

**To submit written testimony for a hearing:** While there is generally a 2-week window after a hearing to submit written testimony, it is best practice to submit to the Committee(s) in advance of the live testimony, 24+ hours, if possible. Committee members often follow along. Written testimony has no length requirement, it can be as long or as short as you like. Any written testimony submitted will be made part of the hearing record.

- Follow the directions from above to navigate to the hearing page. In the upper right corner, click the "Submit Testimony" button. If the deadline to submit testimony for a hearing has already passed, the Submit Testimony button will not be available.
- Select "Live Testimony" or "Record Testimony." Select "Live Testimony" if you previously registered to testify at the hearing. If you are not testifying live and your testimony is only for the written record, choose "Record Testimony." Please use the same name, organization information, and email address that you used if you registered to testify.
  - You can upload testimony in either Adobe PDF, Microsoft Word, Apple Pages, or a plain text file by clicking "Upload my Testimony." You can also type your testimony from this page with some formatting capability by selecting "I will type my testimony here."
  - Check the reCAPTCHA box and click submit. After completing the web form, you should receive a confirmation email from [noreply@dccouncil.gov](mailto:noreply@dccouncil.gov)
  - Once a committee has reviewed submitted testimony, it will automatically be added to the hearing page.

**To submit Voicemail testimony:** If a hearing allows for submitting testimony by voicemail, it will be indicated in the hearing notice. At the beginning of the message, please state and spell your name clearly, provide the name of the organization you represent and title (if any), and then begin your testimony. The voicemail program automatically limits each message to three minutes and generates an automated transcript of each message, which will be included as written testimony in the committee hearing record.

**Viewing hearings live:** Go to the Council Website, click on "Hearings" at the top of the page, then click "Live Events" or go to (and bookmark) <https://dccouncil.gov/hearings>. Hearings are also often shared on another platform the chairperson selects, such as Facebook, X or YouTube. For example, Councilmember Henderson streams Committee on Health hearings on her YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/@cmhenderson>. Please note, if you are testifying virtually, please follow the instructions given to you by the Committee regarding logging in to the appropriate platform.

## What to Expect

### Preparing your testimony.

LTCC leadership can answer any questions and help you prepare for the hearing via email or call. Please feel free to contact Kristin Ewing any time leading up to the hearings you plan to testify at. We will also discuss testifying as well as advocacy and budget priorities in Coalition meetings and Workforce Committee meetings. Ultimately, we encourage you to tell your story and why this issue is important to you, your organization, and the people you work with or for. The template in this document is a helpful guide for drafting oral and written testimony. You can

also go to the DC Council Website video archives ([All Archives](#)) and watch prior hearings to give you an idea of what a hearing is like. If you want to see examples, DC Appleseed has written testimony on its website ([HOME | DC Appleseed](#)). If you plan to testify live, note the allotted time you will receive (this should be in the hearing notice and there is more info below). Practice your testimony to ensure you are within the allotted time.

### **Logging in for the hearing virtually.**

If you sign up to testify live virtually, you will receive an email from [noreply@dccouncil.gov](mailto:noreply@dccouncil.gov) prior to the hearing with additional details on testifying. If you are testifying virtually, you should receive a separate email in advance to register for the unique link on the Zoom platform. Please do not share your link with others; the committee will use your link to identify you when your panel is called to testify.

When you log in to Zoom, you will be entered as a participant in webinar mode. The committee will manually “promote” you from the participant list by panel (groups of four or more), enabling your video, audio, and chat functions. Once promoted, you can be seen and heard by other panelists, Councilmembers, and staff who are logged in until your panel is dismissed or

If you are scheduled to testify later in the day, you do not have to log in to Zoom at the start of the day or stay on for the entire day. You do not have to attend the entire day’s hearing to be able to testify, but you should stay for the duration of your panel. (Please see above for how to access the witness list.) Even if you are listed later in the witness list, you should keep an eye on the hearing once it begins. Witnesses may not show up, and the order can change quickly. If you miss the first time you are called, send a note to the Committee staff; they generally give you another chance to testify before completing public witnesses.

### **Testifying In-Person**

Arrive to the council building and appropriate chamber (room) early (leave time for getting through security and finding the correct room). Typically, in-person witnesses go first, but this is up to the committee chairperson. Witnesses will be called in the order of the witness list. Witnesses will be called in small groups (panels) to come to the witness table. Make sure you bring your testimony to the table (printed or on a device). The committee chair will let you know when it is your turn, and you will want to ensure you turn on your microphone before beginning your testimony.

### **Etiquette and Questions.**

During the hearing, you will be invited to speak by the presiding Councilmember (the Chair of the respective committee). The etiquette in the council chambers and online is not to speak before or after your panel is called and dismissed, and not during other witnesses’ time. If you are at the hearing in person, you are not allowed to have food or drink, and you should silence your phone. Refer to councilmembers as “Councilmember [Last Name].” It sometimes happens

that councilmembers will talk to each other or staff on the dais during a testimony – if this happens during your time, just keep talking and don't get ruffled. Also, be cognizant of your time allotment. Often, you receive 5 minutes if you are testifying on behalf of an organization and 3 minutes if you are testifying as an individual. These time limits are typically in the Hearing Notice. If you are testifying in person, there will be a clock in front of you, and virtually, there should be a timer in the Zoom room. Aim to only use your allotted time to be respectful to other witnesses and the committee.

At the end of each panel, the Chair and any other councilmembers present have the opportunity to ask questions of public witnesses with a pre-determined number of minutes. If they do ask you a question, give your answer, but be mindful that they are on a clock. If they ask a question you do not feel comfortable answering or do not know the answer, you can tell them you'd be happy to follow up with them after the hearing. (LTCC will support you with any follow-up needed.) If another panelist is asked a question that you know the answer to, you can ask permission to respond to the question when they are finished.

## A Brief Guide to Performance Oversight Hearing Season

In January, the Council undertakes a several-week-long agency-by-agency review process in the form of performance oversight hearings. Each Council committee has jurisdiction over a list of government agencies (you can find information on committee jurisdiction under each Committee page here: [Committees for Council Period 26 • Council of the District of Columbia](#)).

During the performance oversight season, all agencies must respond in writing to very specific questions from committees. Questions can be on any topic, but usually focus on what the agency is supposed to do, and how well it accomplished its goal in the previous year. These responses are posted on the Council website, ideally, but not always, before the agency's hearing. Members of the public are invited to share testimony at the relevant agency hearing, and agency leadership also presents testimony and answers questions about the previous year's performance and programs (sometimes on the same date as public witnesses, other times in a separate hearing specifically for government witnesses).

You can view documents from past years at: <https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Hearings/hearings/247>.

## A Brief Guide to DC Budget Hearing Season

DC Fiscal Policy Institute put together an excellent overview of the budget season; the original version is [available here](#) (this is from fiscal year 2022, so dates are not accurate, but the process is). An edited and condensed version of this overview is below. They also have a great [Budget Toolkit](#) worth checking out.

### **Mayor's Budget Proposal Released: March - April**

The Mayor submits a proposed Budget and Financial Plan, which describes proposed operating funding for all DC government agencies and services, in late March or early April. The Mayor will also submit a proposed capital budget, which is a six-year plan for building and improving government facilities and infrastructure. The proposed Fiscal Year (FY) budget and related documents will be posted on the Chief Financial Officer's website.

### **Committee of the Whole Public Briefing on the Mayor's Fiscal Year Proposed Budget and Financial Plan**

The Mayor will brief the DC Council on her proposed budget. This is usually live-streamed on the same platforms as hearings.

### **Agency Budget Oversight Hearings: April - May**

Shortly after the budget is submitted, each Council Committee holds hearings on the budgets of the agencies the committee oversees. There are both public witnesses and executive branch witnesses. The schedule is posted in advance on the Council's website. Questions regarding agency budgets that are submitted by committees to the agencies, and the agencies' responses will be posted on the DC Council website.

### **Final Council Hearing on Overall Proposed Budget: May**

This is a good time to testify on elements of the Mayor's budget that you do and do not like, especially if things important to you or your organization are not included at all in the budget.

### **Council Committee Markups: May**

Each Council committee meets to markup the budgets for the agencies they oversee. The committees cannot appropriate more in total for their agencies than the amount in the Mayor's proposed budget, but they can shift funds within and between agencies and committees. The committees can make recommendations for things they were not able to fund but recommend the full Council find a way to fund them. The committees also adopt recommendations on the Budget Support Act provisions that relate to the committee.

The Council holds a Work Session to discuss the recommendations of each committee and other budget issues.

After the committees complete markup, there is a short period of work to merge the committee actions into a comprehensive budget behind the scenes.

### **First Budget Vote: May – June (legislation requires 2-votes at least 2 weeks apart)**

The full Council votes on the Local Budget Act (LBA), which sets the appropriations level for each agency, and on the Budget Support Act (BSA), which reflects legislative changes in the new budget. These meetings do not include public participation.

### **Second Budget Vote: May - June**

The Council holds the second vote on the Local Budget Act. The federal portion of the budget is then submitted to the U.S. Congress for approval.

### **Second Budget Vote on Budget Support Act: June**

The Council holds the second vote on the Budget Support Act, which includes legislation for any budget proposal that requires a statutory change.

## Testimony Template

We have included a template to help you build out your testimony for the hearings. Please edit and put your remarks in your own words to emphasize the points you would like to drive home.

Be as clear and direct as possible. If you have concrete recommendations, list them and put them in bold at the beginning of your testimony and again at the end if you have time.

We also strongly encourage everyone to identify as a member of the DC Coalition on Long Term Care when introducing themselves during their testimony to show that a broad group of stakeholders are unified in support of this issue.

### **Testimony Template**

**Testimony of [Your Full Name, Position, and Organization if applicable]**

**at the**

**DC Council Committee on [INSERT COMMITTEE] [Budget or Oversight] Hearing for the**

**[INSERT AGENCY, DEPARTMENT, ETC.]**

[DATE]

#### ***(Intro Paragraph)***

Good [morning/afternoon], Chairperson [LAST NAME], members of the Committee on [INSERT COMMITTEE], and staff. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is [YOUR NAME] and I am a [JOB POSITION] at [YOUR ORGANIZATION'S TITLE] or [your relation to long term care (if testifying as an individual)].

***(Introduce yourself or organization: one to two paragraphs)***

- Provide a brief summary of your organization and mission or how you are involved in the long term care sector.
- What's your/your organization's stake in improving long term care in the District.
- Identify as a member of the DC Coalition on Long Term Care.

***(Provide a brief road map to your testimony so councilmembers will know what issue you plan to address. This makes it easier for them to follow along and creates an outline for your testimony: one short paragraph)***

Today I will be testifying about [list the topics you plan to address in your testimony].

***(Tell your story: one to two paragraphs)***

- Share why improving long term care in the District is important to you or your organization.
- Illustrate the need for improving long term care as it relates to you or your organization (training, licensure, etc.)
- Offer a quote or story from your experience or experiences of your students, clients, etc.

***(Outline the specific issues or topics you would like to see addressed, changed, improved, or funded: two to four paragraphs, typically one paragraph per issue)***

- This should be the bulk of your testimony and will be most effective if you speak from direct experience.
  - Identify the specific issues you want addressed, what changes need to be made, or what current laws and policies need to be implemented or operationalized or funded.
    - How would these changes or improvements improve the long term care system for you, your organization, your clients, etc.?
  - What would be the benefit of more effective implementation or sustained funding?
- Especially for performance oversight testimony, emphasize the solutions/actions we seek (i.e. "more widely available training," "consistent resources," "timely implementation of legislation," etc.) to remedy challenges in the current system.
- Especially for budget testimony, reiterate specific budget asks

- Thank the Mayor/Agency/Council for any past support of long term care or the Coalition. Let them know there is still work to be done to meet the needs of consumers and providers.

***(Conclusion: one paragraph)***

- Close with a clear ask.
- “Thank you for the opportunity to testify.”
- “I’m happy to answer any questions.”

## Frequently Asked Questions

- **Is the hearing virtual or in-person?** Most hearings are hybrid with in-person and virtual options. Check hearing details. Either way, hearings are streamed and archived for the public record.
- **What do I need to testify?** If the hearing will be held on *Zoom* or you are *attending virtually*, you need a computer or a phone with the Zoom app, and a strong internet connection. Test the camera and audio where you plan to testify so you can be clearly seen and heard. If the hearing will be held *in person*, arrive at the designated council chambers before the start time (address and room location are in the hearing notice). You will need to account for time to go through security. You should print your remarks, or you can bring your device to read from. (Keep in mind you cannot eat or drink in the council chambers.)
- **How long will I have to testify?** All public witnesses will be told the time limit in advance (check hearing notice), generally three minutes to five minutes, often dependent upon whether you are testifying individually or for an organization.
- **If I sign up to testify, do I have to attend the whole hearing?** No, you do not have to attend the entire hearing, which is expected to run all day. Just be sure to monitor where the Council is in calling witnesses so that you can join 15-20 minutes before it is your turn to testify.
- **If I do not attend the entire day and I am signed up to testify, how long should I prepare to be present?** Witnesses are limited to three to five minutes of testimony, but you will be asked to stay on the entire time your panel (group of witnesses) is called in case any of the Councilmembers want to ask you a question regarding your testimony. Panel sizes vary, but it is a good idea to set aside an hour to be safe.

- **When will the witness list be released?** The witness list is typically released the night before the hearing/24 hours in advance, and is sometimes revised the morning of.