

Speaking Truth to Power!

Preparing and Making Comments at Public Hearings

Speak! Even if your voice shakes - Maggie Kuhn

Thank you for speaking out on this issue!

Speaking at a public hearing is one of the strongest ways you can participate in and show support for our democracy. Taking the time to voice your opinion is important because it helps agency regulators to gauge public sentiment and consider all the issues and concerns.

Planning your comments

Make notes about what you want to say. Tell your story in your own words. What are the 1 to 3 main points that you want to make? How does this issue impact you? Make sure your facts are from a reliable source and provide references. Write it down, review it, and refine it. You will typically have about 3 minutes to speak (about 500 to 750 words written) so be succinct. It is good, but not required, to bring 10 copies of written comments to submit it into the official record.

Making Your Comments

Arrive early – at least a half hour before the hearing is to start, if earlier. You will be called in the order that you sign in. Dress professionally. Be courteous to the hearing staff. These folks have tough jobs and are there mainly to record citizen comments. Introduce yourself; state where you live and why you are there. Stress any expertise you might have on the subject or personal knowledge of the issues. Be a good listener. If the hearing officer asks you any questions answer the best you can or simply state you do not know or the question is beyond your expertise. Do not respond to any heckling or negative comments. Keep it professional. Ask that you be put on their mailing list, and leave your contact information.

Final thoughts

Bring other people! This is an opportunity for democracy in action – your voice and your community's voices are so important. Now go and tell your friends, neighbors and others about your experience. Look for others with the same concerns. Join a local, state, and/or national organization for ideas, information and support. Find out about the next action that you can take on this issue and stay involved.

Good luck and have fun!

