Build Your Speech for a Hearing

Before testifying in front of a committee, it's important to take some time to write down what you want to say and really think about what you're trying to accomplish. Speaking to a committee is one of the most direct ways to speak to legislators and share your thoughts, so it's important to make the most of the opportunity.

When speaking to a committee, you will generally be asking for something specific and achievable, but just like in legislative appointments, the best way to make an impact is to use examples from your own experience to highlight why what you're asking for matters. When I spoke to a committee, I had about 5 minutes to speak, so there is plenty of time to fit in a 2 minute story while connecting it to other ideas.

Know Your Topic

To start off, it's really important to research the topic you want to talk about so you are as prepared as possible. While stories are a great way to get personal and speak from your heart, when speaking to a committee that may not be enough, especially in years with a rough budget. It is helpful to get a perspective on how what you're asking for will be helpful to the state as well, which makes your idea more worthwhile when they are choosing what they can or can't afford. For my speech, I wanted to talk about financial aid and dual credit, but the overall goal was to talk about helping students gain access to higher education, so I researched shortages of skilled workers in Washington state. I was able to find a predicted shortfall, which gave me quantifiable numbers that I could then present to the committee, which gave not just a goal, but an amount. The more research you do, the less the legislators have to look for themselves, which will help them focus more on your request instead of getting into the weeds with numbers.

Organizing Your Speech

Once you've done your research, you can start working on putting your speech together. Like any other time you're presenting to legislators, it's important to start off by thanking them for giving you a few minutes of your time. It's good to also summarize your main points, so the legislators know what to listen for, and what you're going to be talking about.

Once you've got that, you can start talking about your experiences. Including your research near the beginning is important, but depending on your topic, you may want to talk about it right away, or speak to your own experiences a bit first. This could vary from speech to speech, so it can be good to practice your speech to someone else to help identify where you want to place it, or if you want to interweave it in with your examples.

As you go through your own experiences, lay out action items that you would like to see. These are specific actionable ideas that directly present to the legislators what you are asking for, such

as an increase in access to the Washington college grant, having dual credit opportunities at more schools, or having companies and universities work together to provide internships as part of a college degree. This gives legislators something specific to work on, which can help make your goals more achievable.

Lastly, thank the legislators again for their time, and go back through your speech to make sure it's polite and respectful. It's important to keep in mind that legislators are humans just like the rest of us, so staying respectful and considerate is a good way to cement your speech in their good books and give you the best chance at success.

After Your Speech

After giving your speech, take some time to reflect on how it went. Did it go well, did the legislators seem receptive? Were you nervous and talked too fast or too slow? Even without knowing the outcome of what you asked for, that reflection can help improve your next speech. Each experience is a valuable opportunity to improve your skills for the future.