



MAKING PUBLIC COMMENT/TESTIMONY

Providing public comment or testimony to the Montana State Legislature is an opportunity for citizens to share their opinions and experiences directly with lawmakers. This process allows individuals to voice support, concerns, or suggestions about proposed laws or policies during legislative hearings. Whether in person, virtually, or through written submissions, public testimony helps legislators understand how their decisions may impact the people they represent and ensures that community voices are part of the decision-making process.

Tips and General Information

- This is called providing testimony if it is during the legislative session.
- Keep the length of the comment about two minutes.
- Identify yourself with your name, hometown, occupation, affiliation, or other information that will indicate your acquaintance with the subject.
- Spell out your last name for the record.
- End with an ask (e.g., I encourage you to continue to prioritize early childhood education and make it accessible and affordable for Montana families).
- Make sure to say thank you and identify you are available for questions (if comfortable).
- Following decorum is required (see below.) Do not let this scare you!

Beginning of Your Comment/Testimony

Good afternoon Chair _____ and member of the committee. My name is Jane Doe, spelled D-O-E and I am a kindergarten teacher at Yellowstone Elementary, as well as a parent of two children under the age of five years old.

How to Respond to a Question

Legislator (Representative): Mr. Chair, I have a question for Jane Doe.”

Chair: “Question for Jane Doe.”

You: “Yes, Mr. Chair and Representative _____.”

Legislator: “Mr. Chair, Jane Doe, my question is _____. Mr Chair.”

You: “Mr. Chair, Representative _____. Thank you for the question. (answer the question). Thank you. Mr. Chair”.

Providing Virtual Testimony

Step 1: Register to Testify

- Visit the Montana Legislature’s website at <https://www.legmt.gov/participate/>
- Click the "Public Participation" button
- Click the link “sign up now” under *Don't have an account?*
- Enter your email address
- Click the button “Send Verification Code”
- Go to your email to verify your email address
- Continue to fill out the online account information
- Click the button “create account”
- Select “Testify Remotely”
- Select “On a Bill” and use the drop down to select specific bill
- Follow the steps to testify on the bill

Step 2: Check for Confirmation

- After registering, you’ll receive a confirmation email with instructions, including the Zoom link and meeting details for the hearing.

Step 3: Prepare Your Testimony

- Plan your comments to be clear, concise, and under two minutes.
- State your name (spell out your last name) and where you are from.
- Include your personal story and/or facts.

Step 4: Join the Hearing on Zoom

- Make sure your name on Zoom matches the name you used to register.
- Log in to the Zoom meeting 5–10 minutes before the scheduled start time using the provided link.
- Listen to the committee chair’s instructions.
- When it is your time to talk (see the order) raise your hand. You will be unmuted to provide your testimony.

Step 5: After Testimony

- Once you’ve finished providing testimony, stay on the Zoom until the committee is done talking about the bill.
- There is a chance you may be asked a question from a committee member.

Register to testify at least 2 hours before the public comment period.

Proponent = you are in support
Opponent = you are against
Information witness = neutral on the bill but want to provide helpful information

When you join the Zoom call you will be automatically muted and your camera will be off.

Generally, the process will be:

1. The bill will be introduced by a legislator
2. Proponent comments from the room (in-person)
3. Proponent comments virtually (on Zoom)
4. Opponent comments from the room (in-person)
5. Opponent comment virtually (on Zoom)
6. Informational Witness Comment
7. Committee members ask questions
8. The legislator that is sponsoring the bill will “close” the bill



EXAMPLE PUBLIC COMMENT

Good afternoon Chair Rhoades and members of the committee. My name is Jane Doe spelled D-O-E and I am the owner of a XYZ Child Care Business in Butte, Montana.

I'm here today to express my support for HB 648 and to thank the sponsor for introducing this important legislation. As a early educator who works with children everyday, I've seen firsthand how critical the Best Beginnings Child Care Scholarship is for families.

Throughout the pandemic, the challenges and gaps in our child care system became even more evident. Not only did we see how vital child care is for parents to return to work, but we also saw how much more support is needed to support both child care businesses and families.

When parents have access to affordable, high-quality child care, they can join the workforce, contribute to their communities, and support their families. This has a ripple effect that benefits all of us—businesses, schools, and local economies. As a child care provider, I can tell you that the cost of child care is a major barrier for many families, however these are the prices we have to charge to barely break even.

Many parents are underemployed or working fewer hours than they would like to because they can't find or afford quality care for their children. In 2022 alone, the Montana Department of Labor and Industry reported that 45,000 parents were underemployed or had their hours reduced due to a lack of child care.

I also hear from employers in my community who are struggling to recruit and retain workers because child care is scarce and expensive. It's not just parents who are affected—our entire economy is suffering because of child care issues. We need more affordable, accessible options for families and more support for businesses like mine that provide this essential service.

HB 648 is a step in the right direction. It's a bill that will help improve the availability of child care, support small businesses like mine, and ultimately strengthen our local and state economies. We have the opportunity to turn things around and create a brighter future for families, children, and businesses in Montana.

I urge you to support HB 648. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to our children and our state's future. I am available for any questions you may have.