

SPEAKING IN A PUBLIC FORUM

Candidates, elected officials, and government agencies often hold public meetings where members of the public can provide comments on policies. These forums are a great opportunity to share your concerns. They're also an opportunity to organize a larger group of concerned constituents to magnify the impact of your comments.

Research where the meetings occur.

- Candidates may participate in forums organized by local groups.
- Local bodies, such as school boards, often hold public meetings and post about those meetings on their websites. They often follow a regular pattern (for example, the second Thursday of every month). The websites often have information about opportunities for the public to testify on issues before the board.
- Larger legislative bodies, such as city councils or your state's House of Representatives and Senate, may have committee meetings where members of the public can testify.

When you arrive, you may have to check in and add your name to a list of people testifying. There may be many people waiting to speak, and there may be a time limit on individual comments, such as one to two minutes. That's why it's most important to plan ahead so your comments are concise and effective. Keep your remarks short and direct.

- Make sure you tell them you are a constituent, and identify the issue you will discuss.
- In a few sentences, let them know why you are concerned about plastic pollution. Do you have a personal connection to the issue?
- Are you part of a larger group working on this issue? Organizing many constituents to speak out on an issue increases your chances of influencing policies.
- Make a specific ask: Is there a specific bill or policy you want them to pass, or is there a policy you oppose?
- Thank them for their work on the issue.
- The vast majority of community meetings are very civil, but occasionally opinions can get heated. The most effective way to communicate your message is by always staying respectful.

Example script:

Good evening. My name is _____ and I live in _____.

As your constituent, I'm here today to testify about [issue or bill].

[A few sentences about why the issue concerns you.] I'm very concerned about the prevalence of plastic pollution in our drinking water. During a recent beach cleanup I participated in, we found that most litter on our shores is plastic. That plastic enters our drinking water, where it can affect human health.

[Your specific ask.] That's why I urge you to support [name of bill or policy].

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

