

Tips for Testifying

Positive testimony for pending smokefree ordinances will help generate public support for the ordinances and help convince city or county officials to vote for it.

Points to Remember:

- Gather relevant information in advance:
 - Must you sign up to testify?
 - What is your time limit?
 - Try to arrange the order of testifiers, so that smokefree supporters can respond to opposition claims.
- Prepare your testimony in advance, and keep it brief. You often have only two or three minutes to speak. Don't feel compelled to use up the whole time -- make your point quickly and move on. *Practice your speech in advance and time yourself to ensure that you do not speak too long.*
- Identify the most credible and persuasive speakers on the various topics relating to smokefree policy (e.g., science, personal victim/survivor impacts, workplace production, economic impact, etc.). Be sure to have hospitality workers in your line-up.
- Each testifier should stick to one or two points. Organize testimony ahead of time so that supporters cumulatively cover all relevant issues.
- Pay attention to what other speakers have said, and avoid being repetitious of both other speakers and of yourself.
- Pay attention to the elected officials' body language and their comments to one another and to other speakers. You may be able to modify your testimony to address their concerns.
- Whenever possible, use personal anecdotes to illustrate your point. How has secondhand smoke affected you and those around you? Just like the general public and the media, elected officials tend to respond to emotion.
- Maintain eye contact with the elected officials while testifying.
- Use catchy soundbites and phrases. Elected officials remember them and the press will quote them. (Examples: "Your right to smoke stops at the tip of my nose", or "Workers should not have to decide between their health and a paycheck").
- Use visual aids if appropriate. *Example: Does your ordinance include big loopholes? Cut holes in the paper containing the ordinance language and while testifying, hold the paper up explaining that the language is full of holes.*

- Be prepared to answer questions about your topic. If you are asked a question for which you do not know the answer, *don't* speculate or make up an answer. If possible, defer to another speaker or an “expert witness” if you do not know the answer.

Things to Avoid:

- Avoid being unprepared. Make sure to practice your testimony and review your main points before the hearing.
- Avoid testimony on how smoking harms *smokers*, especially in smokefree ordinance campaigns. This information is not directly relevant to smokefree legislation. *This is not a smoker versus nonsmoker issue.*
- If you have prepared written testimony, do *not* simply read it. Summarize your point, and provide copies of your testimony to elected officials. Notecards that summarize your points are better than a full speech.

May be reprinted with appropriate attribution to Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights, © 2006.

0603 (TS-03)