

How and Why to Provide Testimony Related to Pending Legislation in the Kansas Legislature

- Women for Kansas Virtual Chapter Meeting, 2/23/2025, 1-2pm
- Video of meeting will be posted on <https://www.youtube.com/user/WomenForKansas>
- Speaker Jami Reeve (of Women for Kansas-Emporia Chapter and Kansas Appleseed)

Meeting Notes

- Some background information about **Kansas Appleseed** (<https://www.kansasappleseed.org/>)
 - Communities that are more civic-ly engaged have healthier communities. And the opposite is also true: Southeast Kansas has some of the highest food insecurity and lowest voter participation numbers in the state.
 - We (staff and board) of Kansas Appleseed listen to Kansans; we live across the state.
 - We find out from Kansans about the challenges they face, and then we commence research so we can find the data about these challenges.
 - We work with Kansans to use their voices and build their power; one way of doing this is submitting testimony to the legislature.
- **“All political power is inherent in the people.”** Kansas Bill of Rights (<https://sos.ks.gov/publications/kansas-constitution/kansas-constitution-bill-of-rights.html>)
 - The people have the right and the responsibility to hold elected officials.
 - Elected officials need us and we need them.
 - We need to call, email, meet with our elected officials to tell them our perspectives on bills/laws.
- Understanding the **Legislative calendar** (https://www.kslegislature.gov/li/b2025_26/chamber/house/calendar/2025/1/)
 - Jan 13, 2025 the session began.
 - 90-day session
 - This year the session is going “faster” than in previous years. This year the legislature is meeting 5 days a week (instead of the previous 4). We have to pay attention to keep up.
 - “Turnaround” means bills moving between houses.
 - Then all bills go to the governor.
 - Mid-April Veto Session: Legislature will determine if they are going to attempt to override any of the governor’s vetoes.
 - Sine Die: Latin for “without a day”. Legislature goes home unless governor calls for a special session.
- Loud Light graphic on How a Bill Becomes a Law in Kansas (https://www.facebook.com/100065008561679/photos/961530562690554/?_rdr)
- What is Testimony?
 - **Your testimony is your power!**
 - Allows you to share views and information with lawmakers about proposed legislation.
 - You DO NOT need to be an “expert” to submit testimony. Your lived experience is important in the legislative process.

- You can provide testimony in writing or verbally.
- Following proposed bills/laws:
 - Our advocacy needs to start as soon as a bill is introduced.
 - Your legislator might not see a bill until it comes to the floor for a final vote. That's why we need to be involved earlier in the process.
 - The Committee process in the KSLEG allows legislators to hear from ALL Kansans.
 - If you don't live in someone's district, they don't have to give much attention to your views.
 - But if you submit testimony, the entire committee is forced to listen to you. And the purpose of the testimony is for the committee to hear from all Kansans.
- If there's an issue that is important to you, you need to **find related bill numbers** for that legislation.
 - Kansas Legislature's website: www.kslegislature.gov/li/
 - Click on "Bills and Laws" tab to read about all of the pending laws/bills.
 - If you don't know a bill number, look up advocacy organizations related to that issue and check their websites, or social media, or contact them to learn the number.
 - Or contact your legislator (or their office staff) to ask them about a bill's number.
 - Or contact the Kansas State Library (you can call them or use live chat online): <https://library.ks.gov/home>, 785-296-3296
 - Or call the Kansas Legislative Hotline: 1-800-432-3924
- **Example (case study) of SCR 1611 from 2025 session:**
 - Kansas Legislature's website: www.kslegislature.gov/li/
 - Click on Find Bill (in menu on the left) and enter the number.
 - Bill title: "Proposing a constitutional amendment to provide for direct election of supreme court justices and abolish the supreme court nominating commission."
 - Click on the Name of the Committee in the Bill History table/list.
 - On the committee's page, you can find the link to livestream the hearing/testimony and the name and email of the Committee Assistant.
 - Click on "Committee Documents".
 - You have to follow the committee's rules to submit testimony.
 - Click on "Conferee Rules" (refers to those submitting testimony).
 - This hearing requires submission of testimony 24 hours before the committee meeting. If hearing is Monday, you have to submit preceding Friday. But if the legislature is "out of session" on the day before a committee, you have to move back in dates.
 - Contact the Committee Assistant to make sure you know when testimony is due.
 - Some committees require paper copies. If that's a committee rule for the issue you're interested in, contact a partner in Topeka to submit for you (such as Kansas Appleseed).
 - Some committees allow testimony virtually on WebEx.
- **Written or verbal testimony?**
 - Both methods are effective.
 - Do the one that is most effective for you.

- Committee meetings are really insightful and allow you to hear what legislators are thinking about an issue.
- Verbal testimony
 - Even if you are doing verbal testimony, you still have to submit the written version in advance at the appropriate due date.
 - Limited to 2-3 minutes (no matter how much you've written).
 - You're asked to summarize what you've written, rather than directly read it. Or select a few paragraphs to read, rather than the entire thing.
 - Legislators can ask you follow up questions. Legislators are usually very gracious with citizens (even if they're more hard-hitting with lobbyists and professionals).
- **Writing compelling testimony:**
 - Introduce yourself
 - Tell your story
 - Share why the bill matters to you
 - Urge them to oppose or support the bill
 - Thank them for their time
 - Remember this is public – testimony will be uploaded on the legislature's website (with your name and address), typically 24-48 hours after the committee's hearing.
- Showed testimony examples:
 - Citizen's written testimony, which talked about personal experience related to the pending bill and how it would impact them/their loved ones.
 - Kansas Appleseed testimony, which included citations and very detailed information related to their research and long-term engagement with the bill's issues.
- Even after testimony is submitted, **keep up your advocacy!**
 - Also share your testimony with your elected officials in the legislature.
 - Urge the governor to sign or veto a specific bill.
 - Show up to legislative coffees/meet-n-greets in the district to hold your elected officials accountable and share your experiences/views.
 - Vote!
- Q&A:
 - You will need to submit testimony in each chamber's committee on a particular bill (so submit to the House committee and the Senate committee).
 - You will need to be hypervigilant (refreshing the website, reading news, contacting your legislator, etc.) if you want to keep track of bills.
 - If there are advocacy groups in the state that focus on your issue (such as Kansas Appleseed, Loud Light, KIFA, Kansas Action for Children, KNEA, etc.), subscribe to their newsletters, watch their social media posts, read their newsletters, etc. to keep track.
 - The legislative session (and bills/laws) move quickly, but the committee agendas are often updated on Thursdays.
 - A "blessed bill" is one that moves between committees in the same chamber. Women for Kansas will send out Jami's list of "blessed bills." Also see the Sunflower State Journal's list of "blessed bills" from this session so far (requires subscription): <https://sunflowerstatejournal.com/legislature-at-a-mid-point-blessed-house-senate-bills-2/>

- “Gut and Go” or “shell” bills are those that were passed by one chamber and then in the second chamber the text/subject/etc. of the bill was changed (sometimes very significantly). You can identify these bills when their name includes the word “Sub” (such as Sub SB 33 in this session,
https://www.kslegislature.gov/li/b2025_26/measures/sb33/)
- If you can’t find information about a bill or need help navigating websites, etc:
 - Contact the Kansas State Library (you can call them or do a live chat online):
<https://library.ks.gov/home>, 785-296-3296
 - Or call the Kansas Legislative Hotline: 1-800-432-3924
- All of this might seem overwhelming, but **THE MOST IMPORTANT thing to remember is contact YOUR legislator.** Some elected officials view 5 citizens contacting them about a bill as “a lot.” We have to engage with the process and tell legislators our views on issues and pending bills/laws.