



We have prepared the following testimony guide to help you prepare for hearings before the DC Council, such as Performance Oversight and Budget hearings.

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Thank you to the DC OST Coalition for allowing us to borrow their formatting style and content for this guide.



How to Testify

For the last several years, members of the Strengthening Families Through Behavioral Health Coalition (SFC) have testified at Performance Oversight hearings and Budget hearings for the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH). Our goal is to: a) deliver a unified message about the importance of the School-Based Behavioral Health program, through each member's unique perspective, b) to raise issues related to implementation and effectiveness of the program, and c) to advocate for the DBH budget to sufficiently and sustainably fund the School-Based Behavioral Health Program. We encourage every member to **testify live** at hearings to increase the impact of our messages, which will always be developed and shared with members in advance.

Live testimony. The Committee on Health has hosted its virtual hearings on the Zoom video conference platform. Some hearings are being held in-person or hybrid at the John A. Wilson Building at 1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20004. Be sure to check the hearing notice for these details.

Witnesses will have **three or five minutes** to testify, depending on the hearing and the length of the witness list – this is at the discretion of the committee chair. There may or may not be a clock displayed on the screen, so make sure to practice beforehand and/or keep your own time. A three-minute testimony is between 450 and 600 words, or roughly one single-spaced page.

Everyone who testifies live should also submit written testimony, which may be the same as your oral testimony or may be longer to include additional relevant topics or details. Any testimony submitted will be made part of the hearing record. You generally have up to two weeks after the hearing to submit your written testimony, but check each hearing's details for the deadline.

To sign up for live testimony: The new Hearing Management System (HMS) is a universal, centralized way to find out about upcoming hearings, sign up to testify, submit testimony, download testimony, and see who else is testifying.



- Go to the Council Website, click on "Hearings" at the top of the page, then click "HMS: Hearing Management System" or go to (and bookmark) <https://iims.dccouncil.gov/hearings>. Find a hearing by scrolling chronologically through the hearings list, or by looking at the calendar view. You can also filter hearings by committee using the dropdown menu at the top of the page or by entering a keyword in the search bar.
- Once you have identified a hearing you want to testify at, read the **Hearing Notice** at the bottom of the page for additional details. The hearing page shows how many witnesses have already signed up under the "Witnesses" heading. Once a committee uploads a witness list for the hearing, the counter will be replaced by a link to download the witness list.
- Click the **"Register to Testify"** button at the upper right of the page to register to testify at the hearing. If the deadline to sign up for a hearing has already passed, or if there are no public witnesses, the button will not be available.
 - If there are multiple topics to be considered at a hearing, select which one you would like to testify on by placing a checkmark next to the relevant topic or legislation.
 - If testifying on behalf of an organization, select "Organization" and include your title and the organization's name.
 - If you are testifying on your own behalf, select "Individual." There may be additional fields included by a committee to gather additional details.
 - For security purposes, you will have to check a reCAPTCHA box and possibly click pictures to submit your request. After completing the webform, you should receive a confirmation email from noreply@dccouncil.gov.
- Prior to the hearing, you will receive an email from noreply@dccouncil.gov from the committee with additional details on testifying. The witness list will also be available on the hearing page prior to the hearing.



To submit testimony for a hearing: While there is generally a 2-week window after a hearing to submit testimony, it is best practice to submit to the Committee(s) in advance of the live testimony, 24+ hours, if possible. Committee members often follow along. Written testimony has no length requirement, it can be as long or as short as you like. Any written testimony submitted will be made part of the hearing record.

- Click the "**Submit Testimony**" button in the upper right on the hearing page. If the deadline to submit testimony for a hearing has already passed, the Submit Testimony button will not be available.
- Select "Live Testimony" or "Record Testimony." Select "Live Testimony" if you previously registered to testify at the hearing. If your testimony is only for the written record, choose "Record Testimony." Please use the same name, organization information, and email address that you used if you registered to testify.
 - You can upload testimony in either Adobe PDF, Microsoft Word, Apple Pages, or a plain text file by clicking "Upload my Testimony." You can also type your testimony from this page with some formatting capability by selecting "I will type my testimony here."
 - Check the reCAPTCHA box and click submit. After completing the webform, you should receive a confirmation email from noreply@dcccouncil.gov
 - Once a committee has reviewed submitted testimony, it will be added to the hearing page automatically.
 - Individuals will be listed in the order they signed up and grouped in panels by the agency they are testifying about.

To submit Voicemail testimony: If a hearing allows for submitting testimony by voicemail, it will be indicated in the hearing notice. At the beginning of the message please state and spell your name clearly, provide the name of the organization you are representing and title (if any), and then begin your testimony. The voicemail program automatically limits each message to



three minutes and generates an automated transcript of each message, which will be included as written testimony in the committee hearing record.

Viewing hearings live. Go to the Council Website, click on "Hearings" at the top of the page, then click "Live Events" or go to (and bookmark) <https://dccouncil.gov/hearings>. Hearings are also often shared on an additional platform selected by the chairperson, such as Facebook, X or YouTube. For example, Councilmember Henderson streams Committee on Health hearings on her YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/@cmchenderson>.

What to Expect

Preparing your testimony

Tami and Amber are available to answer any questions you may have and to help you prepare for the hearing via email or call. We traditionally host an optional rapid response call when the Mayor's budget is released in March to debrief on the proposed budget and update any talking points. (The invite will be sent out to everyone in the coalition.) If you want to see an example of past testimonies, see [Policy Testimony - Children's Law Center \(childrenslawcenter.org\)](https://www.childrenslawcenter.org/policy-testimony).

Logging in for the hearing virtually

If you sign up to testify live, you will receive an email from noreply@dccouncil.gov prior to the hearing with additional details on testifying. If you are testifying virtually, you should receive a separate email in advance to register for the unique link on the Zoom platform. Please do not share your link with others, the committee will use your link to identify you for when your panel is called to testify.

When you login to Zoom, you will enter as a participant in webinar mode. The committee will manually "promote" you from the participant list by panel (groups of four or more), which will enable your video, audio, and chat functions. Once promoted, you can be seen and heard by other panelists, Councilmembers, and staff who are logged in until your panel is dismissed, or until you exit the Zoom meeting room.



If you are scheduled to testify later in the day, you do not have to log in to Zoom at the start of the day or stay on for the entire day. You do not have to attend the entire day's hearing to be able to testify, but you should stay for the duration of your panel. (Please see above for how to access the witness list.) Even if you are listed later in the witness list, you should keep an eye on the hearing once it begins. Witnesses may not show up, and the order can change quickly. If you miss the first time you are called, send a note to the Committee staff; they generally give you another chance to testify before completing public witnesses.

Etiquette and Questions

During the hearing, you will be invited to speak by the presiding Councilmember. The etiquette in the council chambers is not to speak before or after your panel is called and dismissed, and not during other witness' time. If you are at the hearing in person, you are not allowed to have food or drink, and you should silence your phone. Refer to Councilmembers as "Councilmember [Last Name]." It sometimes happens that Councilmembers will talk to each other or staff on the dais during a testimony – if this happens during your time, just keep talking and don't get ruffled.

At the end of each panel, councilmembers have the opportunity to ask questions of public witnesses with a pre-determined number of minutes. If they do ask you a question, give your answer, but be mindful that they are on a clock. If they ask a question you do not feel comfortable answering or do not know the answer, you can tell them you'd be happy to follow up with them after the hearing. (SFC will support you with any follow up needed.) If another panelist is asked a question that you know the answer to, you can ask permission to respond to the question when they are finished.

Social Media

For Performance Oversight and Budget hearings, we encourage everyone to post on X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, or preferred social media during the hearing. This raises the profile of the issue for Councilmembers and the general public. For suggested posts, the coalition will share graphics, sample text and/or hashtags in advance of the hearing. In the past, we have coordinated "Tweetstorms" at designated times before the hearing to amplify coalition messages. If applicable to a hearing, this will be circulated to the Coalition in advance.



A Brief Guide to the Performance Oversight Season

In January, the Council undertakes an agency-by-agency review process in the form of performance oversight hearings. Each Council committee has jurisdiction over a list of government agencies. During the performance oversight season, all agencies must respond in writing to very specific questions from committees. Questions can be on any topic, but usually focus on what the agency is supposed to do, and how well it accomplished its goal in the previous year. These responses are eventually posted on the Council website, ideally, but not always, before the agency's hearing. Members of the public are invited to share testimony at the relevant agency hearing, and agency leadership also present testimony about the previous year's performance and programs (usually on the same date as public witnesses). You can view documents from past years at <https://dccouncil.gov/committee-oversight/>.

A Brief Guide to the DC Budget Season

DC Fiscal Policy Institute put together an excellent overview of the budget season; the original version is [available here](#). An edited and condensed version is below:

Mayor's Budget Proposal Released: March

The Mayor submits a proposed Budget and Financial Plan, which describes proposed operating funding for all DC government agencies and services, in late March. The Mayor will also submit a proposed capital budget, which is a six-year plan for building and improving government facilities and infrastructure. The proposed Fiscal Year (FY) budget and related documents will be posted on the Chief Financial Officer's website.

Committee of the Whole Public Briefing on the Mayor's Fiscal Year 2023 Proposed Budget and Financial Plan

The Mayor will brief the DC Council on her proposed budget. This is usually livestreamed on the same platforms as hearings.



Agency Budget Oversight Hearings: March - May

Shortly after the budget is submitted, each Council Committee holds hearings on the budgets of the agencies the committee oversees. There are both public witnesses and executive branch witnesses. The schedule is posted in advance on the Council's website. Questions regarding agency budgets that are submitted by committees to the agencies, and the agencies' responses will be posted on the DC Council website.

Final Council Hearing on Overall Proposed Budget: May

This is a good time to testify on elements of the Mayor's budget that you do and do not like, especially if things are not included at all in the budget.

Council Committee Markups: May

Each Council committee meets to markup the budgets for the agencies they oversee. The committees cannot appropriate more in total for their agencies than the amount in the Mayor's proposed budget, but they can shift funds within and between agencies and committees. The committees can make recommendations for things they were not able to fund but recommend the full Council find a way to fund. The committees also adopt recommendations on the Budget Support Act provisions that relate to the committee.

The Council holds a Work Session to discuss the recommendations of each committee and other budget issues.

After the committees complete markup, there is a short period of work to merge the committee actions into a comprehensive budget behind the scenes.

First Budget Vote: May-June

The full Council (Committee of the Whole) votes on the Local Budget Act (LBA), which sets the appropriations level for each agency, and on the Budget Support Act (BSA), which reflects legislative changes in the new budget. These meetings do not include public participation.

Second Budget Vote: May-June



The Council holds the second vote on the Local Budget Act. The federal portion of the budget is then submitted to the U.S. Congress for approval.

Second Budget Vote on Budget Support Act: June

The Council holds the second vote on the Budget Support Act which includes legislation for any budget proposal that requires a statutory change.

Testimony Template

We have included a template to help you build out your testimony for the hearings. Please edit and put your remarks in your own words to emphasize the points you would like to drive home.

Be as clear and direct as possible. If you have concrete recommendations, list and **bold them** at the beginning of your testimony and again at the end if you have time.

We also **strongly encourage** everyone to identify as a member of the SFC when introducing themselves during their testimony to show that a broad group of stakeholders are unified in support of the program as well as the Coalition's asks.

Sample verbal:

DC Special Education Cooperative is a member of the Strengthening Families Through Behavioral Health Coalition. The Strengthening Families Coalition brings together a diverse group of advocates who share a commitment to improving DC's behavioral health care system for children and families.

Sample written:

DC Special Education Cooperative is a member of the Strengthening Families Through Behavioral Health Coalition. The Strengthening Families Coalition brings together a diverse group of advocates who strive to ensure that DC has a fully integrated behavioral health care system in which all DC students, children, youth and families have timely access to high-quality, consistent, affordable and culturally responsive care that meets their needs and enables them to thrive.



Testimony Template

Testimony of [Your Full Name, Position]
At the Budget Hearing for the Department of Behavioral Health
DC Council Committee on Health
[DATE]

Good [morning/afternoon], Chairperson Henderson and members of the Committee on Health. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is **YOUR NAME** and I am a **JOB POSITION** at **YOUR ORGANIZATION'S TITLE**.

Introduce your organization (one to two paragraphs)

- *Provide a brief summary of your organization and mission.*
- *What's your/your organization's stake in improving student, family, and community behavioral health?*
- *I am a member of the Strengthening Families Through Behavioral Health Coalition (SFC). SFC brings together a diverse group of advocates who strive to ensure that DC has a fully integrated behavioral health care system in which all DC students, children, youth and families have timely access to high-quality, consistent, affordable and culturally responsive care that meets their needs and enables them to thrive.*

Tell your story (one to three paragraphs)

- *Share why SBBH and CBO services are important to your organization.*
- *Illustrate the need for access to SBBH programs for your constituents.*
- *Offer a quote or story from students, parents, or educators, or data, such as:*
 - *Data showing behavioral health needs, like [OSSE's Youth Behavioral Risk Survey](#).*
 - *Points from [DC Action's August blog about coverage and distribution of SBBH](#).*
 - *Survey results shared in [Coordinating Council meetings](#) about the reach and satisfaction with services.*
- *Speak from a strengths-based perspective.*



Share why we need continued support for SBBH (one to three paragraphs)

- *Thank the Mayor/Agency and Council for their past support for SBBH and CBOs. Let them there is still work to be done to meet the need for mental and behavioral health services.*
- *This should be the bulk of your testimony, and will be most effective if you speak from direct experience. What would be the benefit of more effective implementation or increased funding? How would schools/providers be able to better support staff, families, and youth?*
- *Especially for performance oversight testimony, emphasize the solutions/actions we seek (i.e. “more widely available services,” “consistent resources,” etc.) to remedy challenges in the program.*
- *Especially for budget testimony, reiterate the points from [our letter to the Mayor about the Fiscal Year \(FY\) 2025 budget](#): “we ask you to continue making critical investments in children’s behavioral health – and increase the reach and efficacy of the SBBH program”:*
 - ***Sustain compensation for SBBH’s community-based clinicians, with inflationary adjustments, so that clinicians are in place to respond to behavioral health needs in DC public schools.***
 - ***Provide compensation and develop guidance for the SBBH Coordinator role so that every school’s Coordinator is equipped to effectively connect staff, students, and families with school behavioral health resources.***
 - ***Pilot the addition of non-clinical staff positions to SBBH teams, which will increase the reach and capacity of the SBBH program’s social-emotional learning and skill-building components.***
 - ***Invest in the development of a District-wide strategic plan for children’s behavioral health to provide a cohesive, whole-system, multi-sectoral and evidence-based approach to the current crisis.***

Conclusion (one paragraph)

- *Close with a clear ask that the Council fully fund the expansion of the SBBH Program and restore funding for CBOs.*
- *Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I’m happy to answer any questions.*



Frequently Asked Questions

- **Is the hearing virtual or in-person?** Most hearings were held virtually last year, but some hybrid and/or in-person meetings are expected this year. Check hearing details. Either way, hearings are streamed and archived for the public record.
- **What do I need to testify?** If the hearing will be held on Zoom, you need is a computer or a phone with the Zoom app, and a strong internet connection. Test the camera and audio where you plan to testify so you can be clearly seen and heard. You can print your statement to read, but if you can share the screen to read from your electronic copy, you will project better.

If the hearing will be held in person, arrive at the designated council chambers before the start time. You will need to account for time to go through security. You should print your remarks, or you can bring your device to read from. (Keep in mind you cannot eat or drink in the council chambers.)

- **How long will I have to testify?** All public witnesses will be told the time limit in advance (check hearing notice), generally three minutes, as many as five minutes.
- **If I sign up to testify, do I have to attend the whole hearing?** No, you do not have to attend the entire hearing, which is expected to run all day. Just be sure to monitor where the Council is in calling witnesses so that you can join 15-20 minutes before it is your turn to testify.
- **If I do not attend the entire day and I am signed up to testify, how long should I prepare to be present for?** Witnesses are limited to three-five minutes of testimony, but you will be asked to stay on the entire time your panel (group of witnesses) is called, in case any of the Councilmembers want to ask you a question regarding your testimony. Panel sizes vary, but it is a good idea to set aside an hour to be safe.
- **When will the witness list be released?** The witness list is typically released the night before the hearing, and is sometimes revised the morning of. We will email it to the coalition and our witness list as soon as it becomes available.



- **My organization testified at the performance oversight hearing in January, should I still testify at the budget hearing?** Yes! Your testimony at performance oversight is important for providing feedback on how DBH has done its job, and what it can do better, and lays the foundation for the case for specific investments in SBBH and CBOs.
- **What's the difference between the DBH budget hearing and the COW budget hearing?** Great question! The DBH hearing will focus specifically on DBH while the COW hearing will focus more on the budget as a whole, revenue, and how we will pay for the investments we are encouraging the council to make.
- **Can multiple people from the same organization testify? Should multiple people from the same organization testify?** Yes, multiple people from the same organization can testify but we recommend keeping it to one person unless the others represent a diversity of perspectives, e.g. one person speaking on behalf of the organization, and others, such as families or student participants, speaking about their experience with the SBBH Program or CBOs.
- **What if I'm asked a question I don't know the answer to?** Oftentimes councilmembers do not ask many, if any questions of public witnesses, but if they do and you do not feel comfortable answering or do not know the answer, you can tell them you'd be happy to follow up with them after the hearing. SFC will support you with any follow up needed.
- **Will I testify in a group or by myself?** Witnesses are called in small groups or panels to testify. You may be on a panel with people you do not know or people speaking on other topics, but that is normal.
- **What if I'm having technical difficulties and miss my name being called?** If this happens, reach out to the committee staff (check hearing notice) to let them know that you were experiencing a technical difficulty and ask if the committee can call on you in a later panel to testify.