

HB 76 Family Peer Support Certification

Sponsor: House Representative Howell (pronouns: they/them)

Introduced By: THE CHILDREN, FAMILIES, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES INTERIM COMMITTEE

Committee Being Addressed on 3/17/25: (S) Public Health, Welfare, and Safety

When and Where: 3/17/2025 3:00 PM in Room 317 (State Capitol Building Helena, MT)

Speaking to a legislative committee in support of a bill is a valuable opportunity to make your voice heard and influence decision-making. When giving a public comment, it's important to be clear, concise, and compelling. Here are some suggestions for how to approach it:

1. Prepare Your Statement

- **Know the Bill:** Be familiar with the bill's text, its key provisions, and any relevant background. Understand how it fits into the broader legislative agenda and why it's important.
- **Understand the Committee:** Research the members of the committee, their positions on related issues, and any specific concerns they may have. Tailor your comments to address their interests and concerns.
- **Anticipate Questions:** Think about potential questions the committee may ask. Prepare brief, well-thought-out answers.

2. Start with a Brief Introduction

- **Address the Chair and Committee:** "Chair Marshall and Members of the Committee" or the Vice Chairs could be sitting in the place of the Chair "Vice Chair Howell and members of the Committee" "Madam Vice Chair Etchart and Members of the Committee"
- **Introduce Yourself:** State your name, then spell your last name for the record, where you're from, and why you're testifying (e.g., as a constituent, expert, organization representative).
- **State Your Support:** Clearly and immediately express that you support the bill. You can say something like, "I am here today to express my strong support for [Bill Number]."

3. Provide a Clear and Concise Explanation of Your Support

- **Why It Matters:** Explain why the bill is important to you, your community, or your organization. Highlight how it addresses a specific need or problem, providing concrete examples if possible.
- **Benefits of the Bill:** Outline the benefits the bill will bring. These can include social, economic, environmental, or public health outcomes.

- **Personal or Local Impact:** Share a personal story or the impact this bill could have on your community or industry. Personalizing your comments can make them more relatable and compelling.

4. Use Data and Evidence

- **Facts and Figures:** If available, provide relevant data, studies, or expert opinions to back up your position. This adds credibility to your statement and can strengthen your argument.
- **Case Studies or Success Stories:** If similar bills have been successful in other areas, cite those examples as evidence of how the bill could work in your area.

5. Be Concise and Focused

- **Stick to Key Points:** Legislative committees typically have tight schedules. Be sure to keep your comments focused and limit your testimony to the most important points.
- **Respect Time Limits:** Follow any time limits provided for public comment, and practice your testimony so that it's within that timeframe.

6. Address Potential Concerns

- **Acknowledge Opposition:** If there is significant opposition to the bill, briefly address it in a way that acknowledges valid concerns but explains why the bill's benefits outweigh those concerns.
- **Propose Solutions:** If there are concerns that can be mitigated through amendments, offer constructive suggestions for improvement.

7. Maintain Professionalism

- **Stay Respectful:** Even if you feel strongly about the bill, maintain a respectful tone when speaking to committee members. Avoid confrontational language.
- **Speak Clearly and Calmly:** Speak at a moderate pace, making sure to project your voice so you can be heard clearly by the committee members.

8. Avoid Pressuring Committee Members

- **Do Not Directly Urge a Vote:** It's important to refrain from explicitly urging committee members to vote in favor of the bill at the end of your testimony. Phrases like "I urge you to vote for this bill" or "Please vote yes" can come across as overly assertive or presumptive. Instead, focus on sharing your perspective, providing information, and explaining the impact the bill has on you or your community.
- **Focus on Your Personal Experience, Not Lobbying:** Your role is to present your personal viewpoint and the lived experiences that inform your stance on the bill. Unlike professional lobbyists, your purpose is not to advocate strategically or tactically but to

offer an authentic, individual perspective on the issue at hand. Stick to sharing how the bill affects you, your community, or your field, rather than attempting to push for a specific legislative outcome.

9. Be Ready for Questions

- **Engage with Questions:** After your comments, legislators may ask follow-up questions. Listen carefully and respond thoughtfully. If you don't know the answer, it's okay to say you will follow up later with more information.
- **Stay Positive:** If the committee challenges your point, maintain a positive and respectful demeanor, and reinforce your key points.

10. Thank the Committee

- **Express Gratitude:** Regardless of the outcome, thank the committee members for their time and consideration. Politeness and professionalism will leave a positive impression.

Example Testimony Structure:

1. **Introduction:**
 - "Good afternoon, Chair Marshall and Members of the Committee, my name is [Your Name], spell your last name, and I am a [resident/worker/advocate] from [Location]. I am speaking in support of [Bill Number]."
2. **Why the Bill is Important:**
 - "This bill is important because [explain the issue the bill addresses]. It will help [describe the positive impact]."
3. **Supporting Evidence:**
 - "Studies have shown that [mention data or studies]. Additionally, in [example city or region], a similar policy has led to [positive outcomes]."
4. **Address Potential Concerns:**
 - "Some may be concerned that [mention a common argument against the bill]. However, [offer a rebuttal or solution]."
5. **Call to Action:**
 - "I urge you to support this bill because it will [restate benefits]. I believe it will make a significant difference for [constituents/community]."
6. **Conclusion:**
 - "Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions."

By staying organized, focused, and respectful, you'll be in a strong position to make a persuasive case in favor of the bill.

Things to Remember When Addressing a Legislative Committee from Your Lived Experience:

1. **Speak from the Heart:**

Your lived experience is a powerful tool, use it. The authenticity and emotion behind your personal story will resonate with the committee members. Sharing your experiences honestly and with passion can be the most effective way to connect with legislators on a human level. It can also be an opportunity to highlight aspects of the issue that might not be covered by data or statistics. When you speak from the heart, your sincerity will shine through, making your testimony more compelling and memorable.

2. **Listen to the Person Who Spoke Before You:**

Pay close attention to the testimony of those who speak before you. This helps avoid redundancy and allows you to build on their points by offering fresh perspectives. When you acknowledge the contributions of others while introducing new ideas or angles, it shows that you are engaged and thoughtful, and it helps keep the committee's attention. Each speaker has a chance to add something unique, and your role is to ensure that your voice adds value to the discussion.

3. **Be Specific and Concrete in Sharing Your Story:**

While speaking from the heart is crucial, being specific about how the issue impacts you or your community makes your testimony even more powerful. Specific examples, whether personal anecdotes or community-wide experiences, help illustrate the real-world consequences of the bill or issue. Don't be afraid to include details that make your story more vivid, it could be the difference between your testimony standing out or blending in.

4. **Keep It Focused and Respectful of Time:**

Committees often have tight schedules, so while your story is important, it's equally important to be concise and stay focused. Avoid going off on tangents, and prioritize the key points that will have the greatest impact. Remember that your testimony is one piece of a larger conversation, so make sure your message is clear and direct. Being respectful of time shows professionalism and ensures that others have an opportunity to speak as well. Keep your public comment to one minute or less (unless otherwise advised by the committee).

5. **Acknowledge the Legislative Process:**

Understand that while your lived experience is invaluable, legislators are often considering a broader range of factors, including political, economic, and social implications. It can be helpful to acknowledge that while your experience is personal, it reflects broader issues or patterns that need attention. This will show that you understand the complexity of the situation while still maintaining the emotional core of your testimony.

6. **Remain Calm and Composed:**

Legislative hearings can be emotionally charged, especially when addressing deeply personal issues. While it's important to express the emotion that comes with your experience, try to remain calm and composed, especially if the subject matter is difficult or painful. Staying composed helps ensure your message is heard clearly and demonstrates your credibility and professionalism.

7. **Connect Your Story to the Bill:**

Make a direct connection between your personal experience and the specific provisions of the bill. How does the bill address the challenges or concerns you've shared? By linking your story to the proposed legislation, you help the committee understand how the bill would make a real difference in people's lives. This gives your testimony context and relevance, ensuring your message isn't lost in the broader conversation.

8. **Be Ready for Questions—And Stay Open:**

After your testimony, committee members may have questions. Approach this opportunity as a chance to clarify or expand on your points. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know" if you're unsure about something—it's better to be honest than to give inaccurate information. Your openness to further dialogue shows your commitment to the issue and your willingness to engage in constructive conversation.

9. **Stay Positive, Even When It's Difficult:**

It can be tempting to focus on the negatives or challenges, but try to frame your comments in a way that also emphasizes the potential for positive change. Even if the issue is emotionally charged or difficult, ending your testimony with a note of hope or potential solutions can leave the committee with a sense of possibility rather than despair.