

2023 TRAINING SERIES

Tips for Making Effective Written and Oral Public Comments

May 24, 2023



LOS ANGELES COUNTY
COMMISSION ON HIV



A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THE COMMISSION ON HIV

- Commission (PC) governed by Los Angeles County Ordinance 03.20.070 http://lacounty-ca.elaws.us/code/coor_title3_ch3.29
- Formally became an integrated PC in 2013
- PC is federally required in order to receive Ryan White funds for HIV/AIDS services
- Housed as an independent commission within the Executive Office of the Board of Supervisor (BOS) of the County of Los Angeles.
- Advise Division of HIV and STD Programs (DHSP) on how to prevent and reduce HIV infections via the integrated HIV plan (aka Comprehensive HIV Plan or CHP)
- 51 voting members; 1/3 (33%) must be unaffiliated consumers (UC)
- UC: PLWH and currently using a Ryan White (RW) Part A – funded service(s) and not employed by an agency receiving RW Part A funds.

Learning Objectives


- Gain practical knowledge and skills to make effective public comments (PC) to elected bodies.
- Practice skills with mock meetings and scenarios.

Why Make Public Comments?

Public input increases transparency and accountability

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A form of civic duty and engagement in the political process

A light brown downward-pointing arrow connects the second box to the third.

Community advocacy and mobilization tool

Key Resources

- **Ralph M. Brown Act** – governs open meetings for local government bodies
- **“Public Testimony:** public may comment on agenda items before or during consideration by the legislative body. Time must be set aside for public to comment on any other matters under the body’s jurisdiction.”

Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Public Comments Guidelines

- Meeting agendas with PC instructions @ <https://bos.lacounty.gov/>
- Telephonic public comments available
- Limited to a **total** of 6 mins per speaker, per meeting
- 1 minute for one item
- 2 mins for multiple items
- 3 mins for multiple items and general public comment

How to participate: <https://bos.lacounty.gov/board-meeting-agendas/how-to-participate>

Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Submitting PCs Online (cont'd)

1. To provide written comments on agenda items, use <https://publiccomment.bos.lacounty.gov/>
2. Complete information at the top of the comment page.
 1. **NOTE:** Required fields are First and Last names
3. Choose the agenda items that you wish to address.
4. Select In Favor, Oppose, Other
 1. **Optional:** You may submit comments for each item separately or upload a document with all of your comments. (Attachment limit is 5 documents)
5. Select “Next”
6. Verify the information is correct and select “Acknowledge” when you are ready to submit.
7. All comments submitted are public and viewable online.

Tips – Live Comments

- Always check the public comment procedures on the meeting agenda.
- Agendas are posted 72 hours ahead of a meeting.
- Keep your comments succinct. Adhere to time limits.
- **Testimonies should cover four basic things:**
 1. Who you are
 2. Why this topic matters to you
 3. What specific points you don't support *and what you do support*

Tips – Live Comments (cont'd)

1. **Be mindful of your tone.** Be aware of how your message will be received
 2. Time is limited, so **keep it brief.**
 3. **Be crystal clear.** Keep your words and your message simple to leave no room for confusion or misinterpretation.
 4. **Be bulletproof.** If you make a claim, back it up with data and reputable sources.
 5. Get a second (and third and even fourth) set of eyes to **review your statement.** Have an honest friend read or listen to your testimony to make absolutely sure your message is coming across effectively.
- **Time Limits**
 - 1-minute testimony = 130 words
 - 2-minute testimony = 260 words
 - 3-minute testimony = 390 words

Tips – Live Comments (cont'd)

Prioritize your message: Make sure your most critical point(s) is/are made in the first minute of your testimony. That way if your time gets cut short, it gets cut off at the end after your most important point has been made.

Be flexible: Be ready to adapt with shorter versions of your testimony if needed. If you're comfortable doing so, you can also adjust your testimony based on the comments made before you, such as eliminating a point that has already been covered and discussing something else in its place, or correcting misinformation in a previous testimony.

Resource: https://www.eli.org/sites/default/files/files-pdf/Verbal-Commenting_1.pdf

Practice & Scenarios

- Board item #11: Proclaiming April 2023 as “Fair Housing Month”
- *How would you prepare for a written public comment?*
- *What would you include in your written public comment?*
- *How will you follow-up with your written public comment submission?*

Practice & Scenarios

- General Public Comments (towards end of Board agenda)
- The Chair just announced that public comments will be limited to 1 min per person.
- HIV or STD is not on the Board's agenda but you want to speak about HIV/STDs.
- How will you prepare for a live comment (telephonic or in person)?
- What will you cover in your comments?
- How will you follow-up with your live public comments?

Q & A



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