

Public Hearings

Congress, state legislatures, and other governing bodies often hold public hearings to collect the public's comments (sometimes called "testimonies" and sometimes called "comments") on issues they are considering for legislation or policies. Knowing how to watch or attend a public hearing is important to stay informed.



What is a hearing?

A hearing is a meeting of a Senate, House, joint, or a special committee of Congress, state legislature, or other policymaking branch. They are usually open to the public. The public means you! Hearings are meetings to discuss topics of interest or proposed legislation, do investigations, or oversee the work of the federal or state government.



How to watch a federal hearing?

Most hearings are open to the public, which means you can attend in-person if you live close to where the hearing is being held. If you want to watch online, it is usually easy to watch federal House and Senate committee hearings live by video by going to their websites:

- U.S. House of Representatives: www.house.gov/committees
- U.S. Senate: www.senate.gov/committees/index.htm

These websites will take you to committee websites. Each committee website has a section on their website called "Hearings." You will see past hearings with recordings to watch the hearing that already happened and a list of future or upcoming hearings.



How to watch a state hearing?

To watch State hearings, it is a little more complicated. You can always go in-person, but not all states provide video recordings of hearings. To check for what is available in your state or territory, search for your state's or territory's legislative website, and then search for hearings. To find your state legislative website, use this online directory:

- National Conference on State Legislatures: www.ncsl.org/aboutus/ncslservice/state-legislative-websites-directory.aspx



Getting ready to watch a hearing

Find out what day and time the hearing is happening. Most hearings have witnesses or people who are experts asked by Members of Congress or State legislators to attend and speak to them. Research the witnesses to learn more about them. Often, the agenda with witness statements or testimonies will be posted on-line before the hearing. Contact your legislators with your thoughts about the issue the hearing is covering. If the hearing allows public testimony consider providing testimony. You can send your legislator's questions that you want them to ask witnesses. Questions to consider:

- How will this impact people with disabilities?
- Have people with disabilities been included in the process?
- Will people with disabilities be included in the process in the future? How?