

CREDIT: <https://marylandshallissue.org/jmain/legislation-tracker/166-how-to-testify-before-the-maryland-general-assembly>

HOW TO TESTIFY BEFORE THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Committee hearings set the tone for how a bill may (or may not) progress. **Your voice is urgently needed** here as bills are more easily amended or sometimes squashed because of hearing testimony. Testimony stays as a part of each bill for all time and committee members **do** remember how these hearings go. Some lawmakers have a vision that doesn't match with reality. Educate them. Help them understand. Your words and input may very well make or break a given bill.

THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

The Maryland General Assembly meets for 90 days each year from January thru April and is made up of two chambers: the Senate and the House of Delegates comprised of 47 Senators and 141 Delegates, respectively.

Bills are introduced into each chamber for their First Reading and then referred to the committee that reflects the area of law or policy affected by the bill.

The committees hear public testimony on the bills, can amend them, and eventually vote on the bills before them. The committee heads (Chairs) have tremendous power because they can decide whether or not to bring a given bill to a vote at all. If a bill is voted favorably out of committee, it goes to the floor of the corresponding chamber for reading and vote. The chamber may further amend the bill. If it passes that second vote, it's on for its Third Reading, where no more amendments may be offered. When a bill passes one chamber, it goes to the opposite where the process begins all over again in that chamber's committees. Both chambers must agree to language in a bill for it to pass and be sent to the Governor's desk for consideration.

VISITING THE COMMITTEES

Last updated 1/12/2023

Signing up for and submitting testimony requires a "MyMGA" account. For the 2023 session, both the House and Senate will permit oral testimony to be given in person or remotely. Each committee has its own rules for the submission of testimony and whoever is chairing each committee decides the procedures for what bills are called, the order they're called in, when and who may testify, for how long, and any other conditions they deem necessary.

- **House of Delegates Protocols** (<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/Pubs-Current/2023%20-%20House-Protocol-Guidelines.pdf>)
- **Senate Witness Guidelines** (<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/Pubs-current/2023%20Senate-Witness-Guidelines.pdf>)

HOW TO TESTIFY AT THE MGA

To sign-up to testify on a bill, you must first make a “MyMGA account”.

1. You can do so [HERE](https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Account/Register/Tracking):
<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Account/Register/Tracking>
2. You will be asked to provide identifying information and a confirmation will be sent to your provided email address. **NOTE: ONLY enter an organization in the last field if you've been given express permission and instruction by that organization to speak on its behalf.**
3. SPECIAL NOTE:
 - The signup window for Senate bills is only available one business day ahead of a bill's hearing between the hours of 8am and 3pm. To speak during a hearing on Monday, one must signup on the preceding Friday.
 - The signup window for House bills is only available two business days ahead of a bill's hearing between the hours of 8am and 3pm. If a bill is scheduled to be heard on Monday or Tuesday, signup is available on Thursday and Friday, respectively.
 - Use the Bill Tracking feature to keep track of when your Bill's window is open
4. Once you've signed in, navigate to “Witness Signup” which you can get to by clicking the MyMGA logo in the **top right of the webpage**.
5. Select the bill or bills you'd like to testify on and whether you are speaking, submitting written testimony, or you can (**and we encourage you to!**) select "Both." The committee does not have to let you speak, as the Chairs have wide discretion over how the hearing proceeds, but your written testimony and stance will always be with the bill file.

Save	Cancel	Signed Up Items	Committees	Judicial Proceedings
Gift Act - Revisions				
<input type="checkbox"/>	SB0270	Senator Waldstreicher	Crimes - Indecent Exposure - Definition	--Position-- --Testimony-- Upload File(s)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	SB0309	Senator Hough	Handgun Permit - Preliminary Approval	Favorable Both Upload File(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	SB0312	Senator Eckardt	Motor Vehicle Registration - Exception for Golf Carts - Hoopers Island and Taylors Island	--Position-- --Testimony-- Upload File(s)

- **Leave the Organization field blank** unless you are speaking on behalf of an organization.
- Select your position (Favorable, Favorable with Amendments, Informational Only, or Unfavorable).
- Then select which kind of testimony you're providing (again, doing both is preferred).
- If you'd like to simply state your position on a bill, you may just select your position and then select "None" in the testimony box.
- If submitting written testimony, you will need to upload a .pdf.

Take your time here and be deliberate with your choices. **Review** your choices before clicking the Save button toward the top of the chart.

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

Written testimony is the **only** method this year to be sure that your input is given for or against a bill. You're also not limited by time like you are when speaking and are free to be as descriptive as you please. All written testimony should include your name, address, contact info, and clearly state your position: Support, Oppose, or Informational Only. Likewise, you can ask the Committee for a favorable or unfavorable report. **Testimony must be submitted in PDF format via the [MyMGA Witness Signup page](#).**

ORAL TESTIMONY

All oral testimony can be presented in person in Annapolis or virtually via Zoom.

All participants speaking virtually must have a camera and microphone available from the device you're using Zoom from. *You will be contacted via email before the hearing to let you know whether or not you've been selected to testify.* You are NOT guaranteed an opportunity to speak before the committee in virtual hearings.

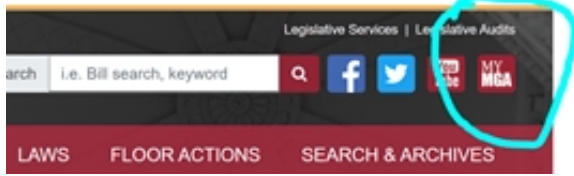
Once they've finished, the chair of the committee may call upon a few pre-selected participants, and others among the public may be chosen. Though you might not be picked, be prepared in case you are. The witness will be given a set time to testify (usually only a minute or two) on the bill or bills before them. Reading directly what you've submitted as written testimony is generally frowned upon -- don't do this. Instead here are some tips to help you along:

- **Remember** that whether you like it or not, you're an **ambassador** for the supporters of the issue. Disparaging remarks might feel good, but they don't help. **Respectfully** speak your mind. Do everyone proud!
- **Briefly** introduce yourself and where you're from.
- Drive home how the bill **personally** affects you.
- Use your personal experiences and expertise to **advocate** from positions of strength.
- **Avoid unnecessary redundancy.** Make or further a point that has not been stated yet by someone else.
- **Be sincere and concise.**
- **Dress and present yourself appropriately.**
- **Always remain civil.**

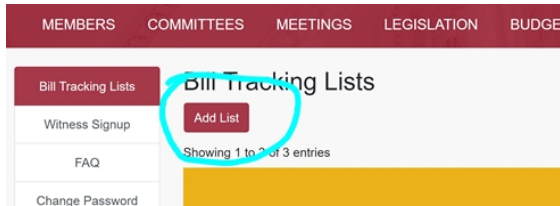
This is very much like live TV, so dress yourself (and your background if speaking virtually) for the part. Committee members may ask questions of you, **so be ready to think on your feet.** If you're called upon and someone has already covered your points, it doesn't hurt to simply say "Support" or "Oppose" and cede your time (the Chair likes that). Even a cheeky "Ditto!" can do. Other bills may be heard before your bill comes up, so be prepared to wait for a potentially long time to speak. These hearings can last **quite a while** and sometimes very late into the evening (and sometimes longer!).

HOW TO USE BILL TRACKING

1. Click the MY MGA button in upper right corner of the page:



2. Click the Add List button. Think about what types of bills you intend to follow and create a separate list for each one. This makes it easier to follow. Give your list a name based on the category of bills you will follow.



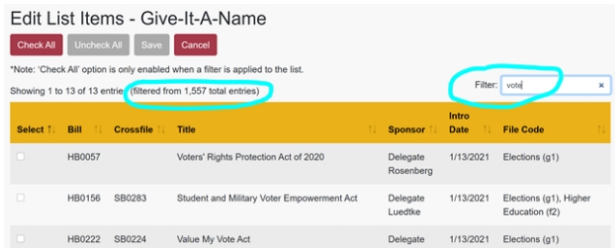
3. Default Notification Setup. Here it also allows you to set up your notifications. If you use Excel, you may like CSV, but most of us just want the notification in our email inbox, so select HTML. Select Yes that you want the notification and then select if you only want to see those bills where the status has changed (Yes) or that you want to see every bill in your list (No). This is a little confusing, so think of it this way – No is you want to see everything, Yes is you want only those bills that have changed. I select No because I want to review all the bills on a regular basis.

A screenshot of the 'Add List (Default Settings)' form. The form has a title bar with a close button. Below the title bar, there is a 'List Name' field with the text 'Give Me A Name'. Below the field, there are three radio button options for 'Format': 'CSV', 'HTML' (selected), and 'JSON'. To the right of the 'Format' options, there are two sections: 'Email Notice' and 'Bill Changes Only'. In the 'Email Notice' section, the 'Yes' radio button is selected. In the 'Bill Changes Only' section, the 'No' radio button is selected. At the bottom right of the form, there are two buttons: 'Cancel' and 'Save'. The 'Save' button is circled in red.

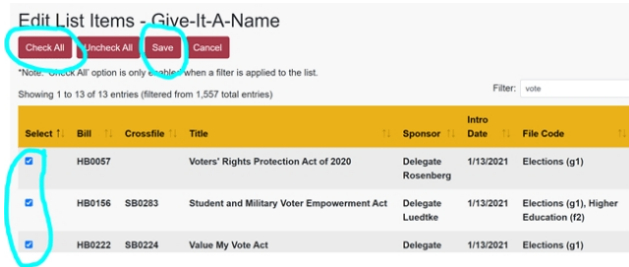
4. Now you want to fill your list. So click on the Edit list button to start filling your list.



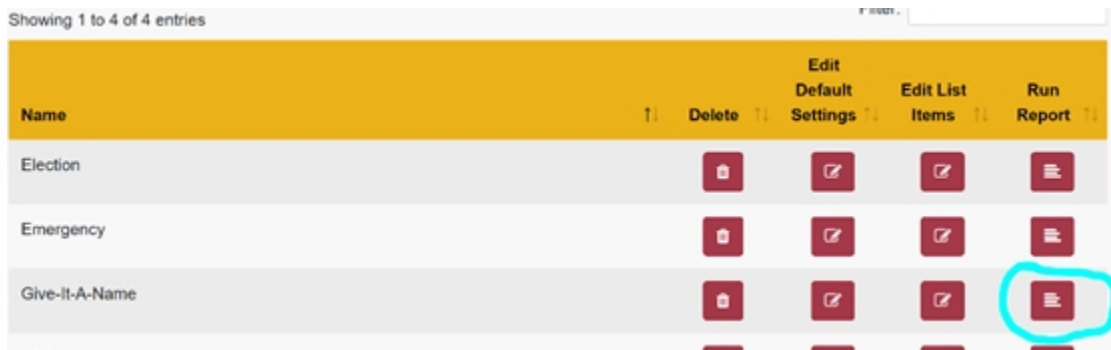
5. Fill list by editing the list items. ProTip: To get all the bills having to do with elections you need to add vote as well as elections! Otherwise you will not have a complete list!)



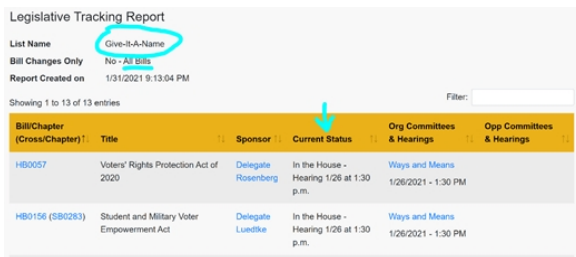
6. Filter down to the category or topic of choice. Now you can select the individual entries that you want or Select All to get everything displayed and save them to your list.



7. Select those of interest and save! Don't forget to Save!! After it saves you can now see your list by running the report.



8. Run report for the new list. The report then gives you the current status of each bill in your list.



Report of the list of bills with status.

Now if you want to add more bills to your list or remove some from your list, simply click edit list again. Your selected items will be displayed first. Or conversely, uncheck those you want to remove from your list. Again don't forget to click on Save List when you are finished.

IN-PERSON ORAL TESTIMONY

GETTING TO ANNAPOLIS

When coming down to Annapolis, pay attention to traffic and try to arrive early. I-97 can be finicky and parking availability is limited. Carpool with some friends if you can. Organize with your fellow supporters on social media and in forums. The more voices, the better!

The Legislative Complex Addresses:

House Office Building
6 Bladen St
Annapolis, MD 21401

Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen St
Annapolis, MD 21401

Paid parking is available in garages and a short walk away in downtown Annapolis, or at the nearby Navy-Marine Corp Memorial Stadium. It is truly in your best interest to arrive early as the parking garages fill quickly. You can take a bus from the stadium into downtown for \$2 cash (have exact change!). The Calvert Street Garage is free to use after 6pm.

To enter, you also need to pass through a security checkpoint with an x-ray machine to screen any bags and a metal detector. **DO NOT FORGET** to remove and secure anything you couldn't take on a plane or into a courtroom long before getting to these buildings. You'll also need to present a photo ID to the security staff when getting screened and wear the guest sticker you're provided. Make sure to keep it on throughout your stay.

These days can be quite long, so plan accordingly.