

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION WITH THE BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL:

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

The legislative process is a public process! Your elected representatives decide on legislation that affects you. Your participation is important. You can participate by submitting written or oral testimony either before or at a public hearing. Every bill has a public hearing..

These following tips are meant to help you participate in the legislative process.

QUICK TIPS

- Read and understand the ordinance or resolution you are commenting on
- Feel Free to reach out to your council representative or the sponsor of the bill with questions
- Be thorough, but concise in supporting your claims
- Base your testimony on sound reasoning, researched information, and how you will be impacted
- Address trade-offs or opposing views in your position
- There is no minimum or maximum length for an effective written testimony; however sometimes there are time limits on oral testimony
- Remember: public participation is not a vote – one well-presented or well-written testimony can be more influential than a hundred form letters or a petition!

DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

The public hearing schedule is available on the Baltimore City Council's website (www.baltimorecitycouncil.com) or in the Executive Secretary's Office at City Hall. If you plan to participate, begin to form your position well before the scheduled hearing.

First, attempt to fully understand the issue. If you have questions, you can bring them with you to the hearing but you can also reach out to your City Council representatives or the sponsor of the legislation beforehand. All of the bills are available online and as agencies submit reports, those are also made available on the City Council's website. Make sure to review all the information available so you know as much as possible about the legislation.

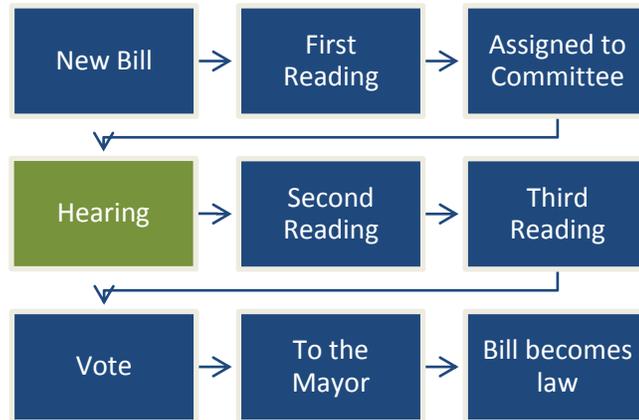
Second, clearly identify who you are and what you are commenting on. If sending a letter, include the bill number and title at the beginning of your letter. Be sure to also include your name and address or neighborhood. If you are commenting on the entire proposal, that's okay but if you are only concerned with a specific section, provide the section and page numbers you are commenting on. If you have a lot of concerns, you don't necessarily have to list them all. You can list those that you are most concerned about, understand the best, or have suggestions on how to change.

Constructive testimony, both positive and negative, is very useful and likely to have the most influence. If you disagree with the legislation, suggesting alternatives and an explanation of how your alternative might meet the same objective or be more effective can be very helpful. If you agree with the legislation, explaining how the proposed law will be beneficial to you can be just as helpful. If there are trade-offs or pro's and con's of your position that you are aware of and can explain, do so. Also, identify credentials and experience that can distinguish your position from others. If you have relevant personal or professional experience, say so.

Third, you can submit your testimony ahead of time or at the hearing. If you want to submit ahead of time, send your letter to the Executive Secretary of the Baltimore City Council for the bill's file and to your representatives (contact information is on the City Council's website). If you plan to present your testimony in person, bring a copy with you to the hearing so that your comments can be included in the bill file. Also, keep a copy of your written testimony. This helps ensure that if you submit it ahead of time and then decide to speak at the hearing, you have a copy ready to go.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION WITH THE BALTIMORE CITY COUNCIL:
HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

OVERVIEW OF THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS



Introduction: A bill is submitted by a Council member for introduction to the City Council. All bills are introduced at a City Council Meeting.

First Reading (Introduction): Each bill is given a number by the Executive Secretary to the Council and assigned to a committee. The bill number and title are read at the Council meeting and the President assigns each bill that is not immediately adopted to the appropriate committee for study. Much of the work of the Council is done in committees. A copy of the bill is also sent to various city agencies, who then issue a report on the bill.

Hearing: Generally, a committee will hold a public hearing after all reports are received from agencies. Legislation may be heard more quickly, if requested by the Committee Chair and approved by the City Council. **All hearings are public and it is at the public hearings that you can come testify in support or opposition of a bill.**

Public Hearing Schedule: Committee Chairs announce hearings at City Council Meetings and the City Council publishes a hearing schedule. A free copy of the hearing schedule may be obtained from the Office of the Executive Secretary or from the City Council website at www.baltimorecitycouncil.com.

Second Reading: The committee chair, with the approval of a majority of committee members, reports the bill at a City Council meeting, with one of the following recommendations: favorable, favorable with amendments, unfavorable, or without recommendation.

Third Reading: When a bill has passed second reading, the Department of Legislative Reference prepares and prints the bill for third reading. At this point the bill contains appropriate forms for endorsements and signatures. At this final stage, the bill may be: passed by the City Council and sent to the Mayor, voted down by the Council, amended by the Council, or returned to committee for further study. Final action on a bill requires a majority vote of all Councilmembers. Amending and taking final action on a bill requires a three-quarters vote of the whole Council. Then, the Council President signs the bill and sends it to the mayor.

A Bill Becomes Law: After the mayor signs it, or if the mayor fails to sign the bill within three regular Council meetings. The mayor may veto the bill; however, a three-quarters majority of the City Council could vote 'yes' to override the Mayor's veto.