**ADVOCACY AT THE CAPITOL**

Drafting Effective Testimony:

* Public comments are limited generally to 3 minutes
* Suggested outline
  + Start with “Chairman xxxx, members of the xxx Committee, I am (NAME) and am here as a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ “ e.g. parent with children in public schools
  + Statement of whether you support or oppose the bill
  + Reasons for your support or opposition – how the bill will impact your children’s education
  + If you’re opposing the bill, be specific about what you don’t like. If possible, offer some alternatives
  + Personal stories resonate with legislators: rather than general statements, relate how the bill is going to personally affect you, your children, your school …

Before you go: go online to **Texas Legislature Online (TLO)**: <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/>

* Confirm the committee that is hearing your bill and the latest version of the bill
  + Type in your bill number, such as HBXX or SBXX (no spaces), and click “Go”
  + The first tab will be history, where you can confirm the committee that is hearing your bill, where it says “referred to”
  + Also go to the “Text” tab to confirm the latest version. If there is a committee substitute, it should show up there.
* Confirm time, date, and place of committee hearing
  + On the left side of the home page, click on the appropriate “Committee” link (either House or Senate). Then, click on your specific committee (e.g. Public Education). That page will list the committee members. In the middle of the page, there will also be a “meetings” link. Click on that to show the upcoming meetings. Each meeting will have a hearing notice that will give you the time, date, place of the committee meeting.

When you get there:

* Parking: the most convenient is **Capitol Visitor Parking Garage,** located between San Jacinto and Trinity streets and 12th and 13th streets. Rates are reasonable - the first 2 hours are free. Parking on the street is metered - bring quarters if the garage is full.
* Security at Capitol entrance: sometimes the line gets long; allow some time for that
* Locate your committee hearing room – maps are available at <http://www.tspb.state.tx.us/SPB/Plan/FloorPlan/FlorPlan.htm>
* To be called up to give testimony, you must fill out a **Witness Card** – they are usually available at the entrance to the committee room. If not, feel free to ask the committee clerk, usually located near the front of the room. Indicate on the card, if you are testifying “For” Against” or “On” the bill – “On” means that you neither support nor oppose the bill.
* Public witnesses are called in the order in which they sign the card (with a few exceptions). Public witnesses go after any Invited Testimony – which can take a while. Instead of oral testimony, you can give your written testimony to the clerk for distribution. Bring at least enough copies for each member of the committee.