



### Public Hearing Etiquette:

#### **A Few Helpful Tips for Understanding What Goes on at a Public Hearing**

- The first thing to keep in mind is that public hearings are not a “debate” forum. Do not expect the committee members to respond to questions or take part in debating an issue.
- As you are testifying the committee members may ask you questions regarding your testimony. If you don't know the answer, don't be afraid of saying so and that you will gladly try to get an answer for them at a later date.
- Normally you must sign in in order to testify. Generally there is a sign in sheet with a committee staff person nearby to answer questions.
- They will likely ask whether you are pro/con on certain bills.
- You might have to wait a while before you are called to testify. Your wait time could vary from a few minutes to several hours. Please be prepared to wait.
- Traditionally, elected and appointed officials will be taken out of turn to testify. Do not get upset if they are called before you.
- Address legislators by their title and sir name (Representative X, Senator Y)
- Be polite. You are asking the committee to listen to your story. Rudeness does effect positive change.
- Do not expect a decision to be made at the hearing. They are only listening and will decide on a bill or bills later. There are several hearings on the gun laws that run into September 2013.
- Signs, banners, flags, and other signage is not allowed to be shown during the committee hearing. Please do not bring any to distribute inside the hearing room.
- Please do not “boo”, hiss, or applaud during testimony. It is considered rude and disruptive and does not help our cause. Whoever is considered disruptive during a hearing could be asked to leave or be removed by the committee.

## **HOW TO GIVE EFFECTIVE PUBLIC TESTIMONY:** **Tips for Speaking Before the Committee**

- Address the committee when you begin your testimony. Say “thank you” for coming to your area and allowing us to provide you with testimony, Mr. Chairman and the committee.
- Make your testimony personal. The committee is interested in hearing how the laws affect the lives of their constituents. Use your time before the committee to tell your story. It is a powerful tool in getting your message across.
- Oral testimony; 2-3 minutes in length is standard for public testimony. Please limit your personal story to this timeframe. If you go over, usually the Chairman will guide you to finish or continue. Make your comments brief and leave time for the Committee to ask you questions.
- GOAL is providing you a template on which you can write and submit your testimony to the committee. Please submit this after your oral testimony but do not read your testimony straight from the document. The committee frowns on this – and it is not as powerful as you speaking from your heart.
- Make sure you include accurate facts in your testimony. Here are some documents GOAL created to provide facts about the gun licensing system in Massachusetts and about gun violence in the Commonwealth. Utilize these helpful documents while creating your testimony:

<http://www.goal.org/newspages/homicides-doubled-since-1998.html>

<http://www.goal.org/2013-gun-crime-report.html>

<http://www.goal.org/newspages/feeviolation.html>

<http://www.goal.org/newspages/decadeofdisaster.html>

- At the end of your testimony, thank the committee for its interest in your testimony and ask the committee if they have any questions for you. This can help start a dialogue about your personal story and experiences.
- Print out the testimony submission sheet provided by GOAL and fill it out and hand it into the Committee at either the beginning or end of your testimony. This helps connect the Committee to your testimony and provides a “leave behind” for Committee researchers to consider while developing legislation.

# Gun Owners' Action League Public Hearing Preparation Package



## YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Although your local Representative and/or Senator may not serve on the committee you are testifying before, it is always helpful to have their information at hand. Use the link provided below to obtain that information and keep it handy.

Use this link to find your elected officials for your area: [www.wheredoivote.com](http://www.wheredoivote.com)

- Your **STATE REPRESENTATIVE:**

Phone#: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax#: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address (including room#): \_\_\_\_\_

- Your **STATE SENATOR:**

Phone#: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax#: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address (including room#): \_\_\_\_\_