

How do I testify for or against gun bills in RI?

- 1) Know what bills are being heard on the proper date. <http://status.rilin.state.ri.us/>. Access this website and track the bills that you are interested in. By law they must be posted 48 hours before they are heard in committee. This site will tell you when (day and time) and where (what room in the state house) the bill(s) will be heard.
- 2) Arrive to testify EARLY (3pm). Most postings will call the hearings to commence “at the *Rise of the Senate* (or House)”. That essentially means “when they are done with all the business on the Floor.” It can be 4:45pm, it can be 7:45pm you will not know in advance.
- 3) If you go to the committee hearing room that is listed, there will be a sign up sheet for each bill. Sign your name, organization (if there is one) and whether you are “pro” (in favor) or “con” (against). If you must leave before you have a chance to testify, they will at least know where you stand. You can also check the box “NOT TESTIFYING” and they will read your name aloud, what your position is, and that you will not be testifying.
- 4) Parking will not be easy. Park nearby and maybe carpool to the state house or park in the mall garage.
- 5) NEVER bring a firearm to the State House. Carry Permit or not – you will be thrown out, and it will reflect poorly on our community. Even if it is a Revolutionary War, inoperable firearm. DO NOT BRING THEM WITH YOU.
- 6) If possible – listen to all the testimony being given because you will have a time limit to testify within, and you don’t want to repeat what others have said. If the committee room is packed, there is typically an overflow area with a TV so you can watch the other people who testify and hear what they have to say.
- 7) Be brief and straight to the point. If you are going to use statistics – DO NOT READ THEM. Boil them down to as few words as possible and write them down on index cards. DO NOT READ YOUR TESTIMONY. This will put committee members to sleep. You want your testimony to be memorable, and meaningful. It should illustrate why you support or oppose the bill.
- 8) You may also print out your testimony, or a longer version of it, and bring 15 copies. When you arrive to sign in, hand them to the committee clerk who will be there with the sign in sheets and ask to have them passed out to the committee.
- 9) Do not use slang terms like “When I *blast* a deer.” You would rather say “When a deer is *harvested*...” We want everyone listening to realize that we are normal, everyday folks - NOT what the other side describes us as - "blood thirsty lunatics"
- 10) Speak respectfully to committee members. Some may try to egg you on and get you to explode – don’t take the bait. If a member is wrong about something they state, you need to let them know, but not confrontationally. “You don’t know what you’re talking about!” should actually be stated as “I believe that is mistaken because...”
- 11) Anecdotes, or stories from your life experience, aren’t always the best testimony. Sticking to facts, data, and basically knowing the subject matter is the best way to offer testimony. ALWAYS – ALWAYS – ALWAYS have references to data that you cite. They WILL challenge you on it. In fact, it’s best to start off with the citation such as “According to a 1998 study by the Center for Disease Control...”
- 12) If you're challenged on something, and you don't have the answer, you have 2 choices. If you know someone else in the room will have the answer, simply state “I am fairly certain I know the answer to that, but there will be others testifying after me who have the actual data to support it”. Second, you can also say “I have the information at home, and will email it to the clerk tomorrow to provide to the committee.” NEVER “wing it” - that's what the other side does - we don't.
- 13) You can counter what someone may have said in their testimony prior to you if you think that they lied or misstated facts – just refer back to them respectfully and correct what they said. But only do this if you think their testimony had an effect on the committee that would hurt our position. If what they said was laughable, and everyone knew it, then let it be. Remember - the majority of their arguments will be based solely in "emotion" and not evidence based. So often times they will cite statistics that are from a study they found on the internet, but the 2nd Amendment Community has already discredited that study or the methodology used. Rely on FACTS, and if they state something as FACT that is incorrect and it appears to have impacted the committee, we should be prepared to address it.

- 14) Avoid the terms “gun”, “weapon”, “assault weapon” – we should always use the proper term “firearm”. In the case of “assault weapons” we prefer to use “so-called assault weapons”, or “what some people refer to as assault-weapons.” Do not waste your limited amount of time to try to educate someone on why the term “assault weapon” is incorrect because they've all heard that history lesson before and at this point they either understand the truth, or they don't and never will.
- 15) ALWAYS make sure that the testimony you are giving is directly related to the bill that is being heard – if you stray from the bill's subject, the chair will stop you and you will lose time to testify. Even if you believe what you are going to say will eventually get your point across about THAT bill, you do not want to appear to “ignore” or “resist” the chairman's request to “stick to the merits of this particular legislation.” That annoys the chairman, and it annoys the committee members. Even if you've noticed that they've allowed the “other side” to stray from the bill but they are holding our feet to the fire, don't let that anger you. Remember - straying from the bill causes the committee to “zone out” what is being said, so if the other side wants to stray - let them, it will cause them to become irrelevant.
- 16) There is an extremely high likelihood that those testifying on the opposing side will get “overly emotional”. Do not take that bait either – let them come across as overly emotional, while you remain calm, and deliver facts, reason, and common sense.
- 17) SIGNS and T-SHIRTS - Wearing your PETA (People Eating Tasty Animals) T-Shirt to a hearing is probably not a good idea. We can leave the “From my cold dead hands” signs and hats at home and come dressed as we normally do from work - whether it's in a 3-piece suit, or with split knuckles and grease under our fingernails. We are everyday people who work and live normal lives and we want to let the committee know this. A hat that says “I'm the NRA and I Vote” is perfectly appropriate, it's just the items and signs that say things that the TV cameras will focus on and that's what you'll see on the news when they show “our community” - there will be a guy with a sign that says “Ted Kennedy's car has killed more people than my guns” and that does not send a good message out to the 20,000 viewers of that news broadcast.
- 18) **IMPORTANT** - this cannot be overstated enough. We have had incidents in the past 5 years where members of the opposition have engaged in aggressive behavior towards members of our community in the hallways, or in the rotunda of the state house, or during rallies. YOU MUST be able to keep yourself under control - even if that means you must let someone punch you in the face - and YES, it has gotten that tense in the past. The BEST thing that could ever happen for us, would be to have someone from the other side actually become unhinged and lose control. At that point - especially if there is a physical altercation - take someone who witnessed the altercation with you to the nearest Capital Police Officer and tell them about the incident. They may very well remove that individual - or group of individuals from the state house. ALSO REMEMBER - that they too want a member of our community to “punch them in the face”, so no matter how confrontational they get, stay calm, speak softly but firmly, do not use offensive or profane language and try to remove yourself from the situation. We do not gain ANYTHING by trying to “convert” an anti-2nd Amendment zealot - they are not interested in logic, truth or statistics so save your breath for the committee room.