You’ve succeeded in setting up a Zoom (or Teams, or Google Meet) meeting with your state senator’s staff, or your local city councilperson. Or, maybe you’ve signed up to testify at a virtual hearing. Now what?

Prepare for the technology.
- Like any internet “App,” play with it and explore all of its features.
- What kind of microphone will you be using? You may want to test your microphone through a free account with a colleague or friend before the meeting in the app you’ll be using. If possible, use a headset or other higher quality microphone to make sure your testimony can be understood.
- Prepare how you will come across.
  - Consider your background, lighting and appearance.
    - Should you use a virtual background? Virtual backgrounds tend to tax your system more. Make sure that your computer can handle a virtual background before using one during a hearing.
    - What should you wear? While it is a common joke about wearing pajama pants, it’s true that what you are wearing from the waist up is what matters. Consider a solid colored dress shirt, and keep your accessories minimal. One Chapter leader said, “drawing on my 30+ years of testifying or being an elected official receiving testimony, if you are testifying for an organization, look “professional”. If you are testifying as a citizen, then you should look clean and neat. Do not wear clothing in need of repair or washing.
  - Lighting: To do this on a budget, turn on any light you have handy, and position it behind whatever camera/computer camera you are using, so that it is shining on your face. You might have to move a lamp, or choose another spot for your computer if you cannot move a light. Sitting in front of your laptop with a window at a minimum of three feet away providing natural light is also a good solution.

Prepare Your Statement and Make It Sharp.
- Find out, ahead of time, how much time you will have to speak. Be prepared to finish early—aim for at least 10 to 15 seconds.
- Think about your audience. Are they more business-focused or are they known to support the environment? Tailor your talking points to hit the issues you know they will be most concerned with, not what you think they should be concerned with. Always remember you are trying to win them over. What is it that would be the most persuasive to them, not you.
- If you are testifying as part of a panel, do not repeat material or arguments from earlier panelists unless you are emphasizing a point. Practice ahead of time to make sure that you can fit your content into the time allowed - do not go long.
Put Your Best Speaking Voice Forward.

What is the best way to “read” testimony on a video screen?

- Rehearse your presentation, both for wording and for timing.
- Put your testimony on the screen near where your camera will be (on screen if your camera is on your laptop). This way, when you read it looks more natural and you can more easily make eye contact with your audience.
- If you are comfortable, use bullet points to prompt you to speak more informally.

Should you plan to “share screen”?

- Do legislators expect presentations? If so, practice sharing your screen ahead of time with a friend, family member or coworker.
- If no presentation is required, and if you’re not comfortable sharing your screen, is it better not to.

Troubleshooting:

- If you know you “are frozen” (ie your internet connection is unstable) as soon as you are back in action apologize and ask if you may repeat what you said. If time is tight, try to work what was missed into the rest of your statement.
- Questions and/or interruptions from your audience: listen carefully to the question. Answers should be short and to the point. Do not get sidetracked unless you are sure it will deal directly with the issue/question raised.

- Once its over-do you stay on the call? How do legislative panels work—will you be asked questions later on?
- Normally legislators as questions immediately after you speak, or you may be asked to wait until others on your panel are done with their statements.
- You may want to remain in the meeting to hear what other supporters/opponents bring up. It could shape any future testimony you give, or that you send to the legislators after to meeting.

Some Don’ts:

- When you’re on mute don’t speak (lips can be read or, sometimes the mute button doesn’t work as you expect!), make facial gestures, or other commentary if you can be seen.
- You may turn off your camera if you need/want to when you are not speaking.

Our thanks to Ginny Black, president of Minnesota Composting Council (MNCC) and Emily Ranson of Clean Water Action, active in Maryland-DC Compost Council (MD-DC) for these tips. They both spend a lot of time in front of legislators!