



HOW TO GIVE PUBLIC COMMENTS AT CITY COUNCIL OR COUNTY SUPERVISORS MEETING

Speaking up in a public comment period during your local City Council or Board of Supervisors meeting is an impactful way to get your campaign's message out. These meetings provide your coalition with the opportunity to showcase their passion for the issue, share personal stories, and deliver the campaign's message to important decision makers in your city and county.



WHAT HAPPENS AT A CITY COUNCIL OR BOARD OF SUPERVISORS MEETING?

Your local City Council and/or Board of Supervisors meets regularly to govern the corresponding jurisdiction including enacting key public health policies about tobacco control. Policies passed by City Councils affect only the area within city limits. Policies passed by a County Board of Supervisors affect only the unincorporated County property, not the property that is within the boundary of a town or a city that has its own Council.

HOW TO GIVE PUBLIC COMMENTS

Members of the public can give comments, usually referred to as testimony, during local City Council and Board of Supervisors meetings on items that appear on that meeting's agenda, as well as items that are not on the agenda.

First, let's talk about items that are on the agenda. In most jurisdictions, the public comment period occurs after a presentation has been given on your issue by the City or County staff to the policymaking body, and right before the body has their public discussion and takes a vote.

Now, let's talk about items that are not on the agenda. Most jurisdictions offer a public comment period at the beginning of the meeting for any item that is not on the

agenda. General public comment is a great way for the community to raise awareness about a desired tobacco control policy that they have not been able to get on the policymaking body's agenda yet.

Public comments used to be only delivered in person by attending the meeting. Now, some jurisdictions are only allowing public comment virtually over Zoom or by phone, and some offer both in person and virtual options. You can find out the specific situation in your jurisdiction at their website where they list instructions for delivering public comment. When a public comment is going to be delivered in person, many jurisdictions require you to fill out a speaker card and turn it in to the clerk in advance of the item.

Public comment speakers are usually allotted up to three minutes to speak. The time varies for each city or county and can be influenced by how many speakers have signed up for a particular agenda item. Speakers will deliver the following information in order:

- Their name and the organization they represent, if that's their purpose;
- Where they live if they are a constituent of the jurisdiction;
- Their view on the issue;
- Why the issue is important to them. [This is a good place to tell a personal story or cite a relevant fact or statistic;](#) and
- Deliver an ASK of the jurisdiction.



REMINDER!

Projects and programs funded by the California Tobacco Control Program from Proposition 99 and Proposition 56 funds cannot lobby. They cannot promote "support" or "opposition" positions on a specific piece of legislation, ordinance, or ballot measure. They can, however, educate the governing body on relevant local statistics, share a personal story, or inform them about the important work that they are doing in the community in relation to the policy under discussion.

Source: *Rules of the Road, California Tobacco Control Program*

DO'S AND DON'TS

- Do demonstrate your knowledge, passion and credibility about the issue.
- Do practice your prepared remarks out loud and time yourself. Have a one, two and three minute version ready.
- Don't go over the allotted time. If the time ends, stop mid-sentence and close by saying "thank you."
- Don't underestimate the value of a personal experience. Personal stories make you memorable and can sway an undecided decision maker.

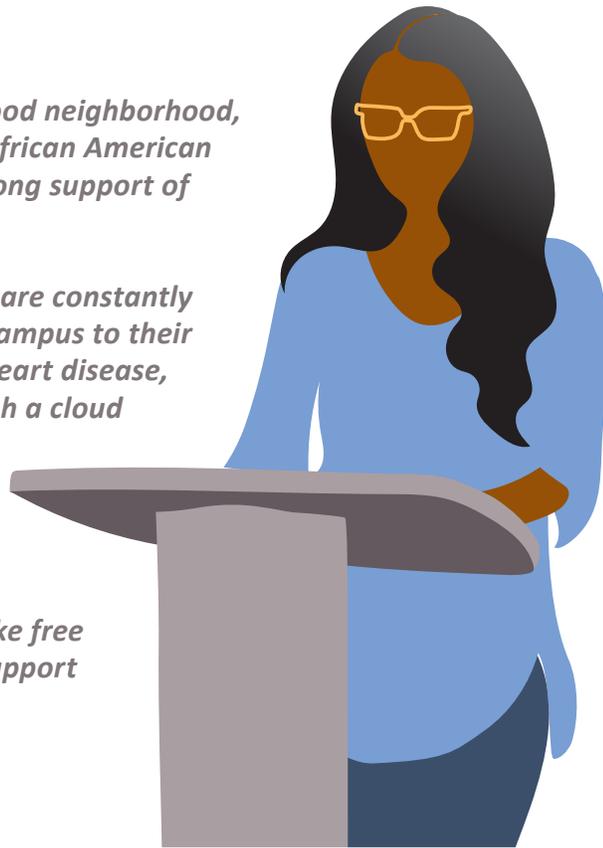
SAMPLE PUBLIC COMMENT

“Hello my name is Leanne. I live in the Westwood neighborhood, and I’m a student at UCLA working with the African American Tobacco Control Leadership Council. I’m in strong support of this smoke-free campus policy.

“Even if they’re not the one smoking, students are constantly exposed to secondhand smoke as they cross campus to their next class, putting them at risk for coronary heart disease, stroke, and lung cancer. I have to walk through a cloud of smoke to get into one of my classroom buildings because kids smoke near the entrance. Our school campuses should be a healthy and safe space for all students.

“Los Angeles must be a leader in creating smoke free environments for all students. I urge you to support this important issue.

“Thank you for your time.”



ALSO THINK ABOUT

- Watch old City Council or Board of Supervisors meetings ahead of time to prepare.
- If the jurisdiction has elected officials that represent only a portion of the geography, rather than at-large members, find out which elected official represents your area and mention that in your testimony, as in “My family and I live in Councilmember Smith’s District.”
- If you are not comfortable speaking in public, an alternative to the oral public comment period may be to submit written comments in advance of the hearing. A written public comment should not be any longer, nor more detailed, than a public comment delivered verbally. Check your local jurisdictions’ rules for meetings to see if this option is allowed.



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