

**CVA Guide to Testifying Before a Committee of the CT General Assembly and Navigating the Legislative Office Building\*** By Chris Zaleski, CT Votes for Animals volunteer

*Dear friends of the animals,*

*Attending a public hearing and testifying can be an exciting (and sometimes intimidating) experience. Like everything else, one must take the good with the bad. Sure, finding a parking space can be difficult. Sure, spending the majority of your day waiting to testify can be boring. But by testifying you will be speaking on behalf of the animals who have no voice. And you will be involved in the process of shaping legislation to protect animals. These advantages certainly outweigh the challenges involved in the legislative process.*

*A few years ago, a friend asked me to testify at a public hearing. I knew nothing about the legislative process but agreed to speak. I was completely overwhelmed by the size of the room and by the amount of people crowded into the room. I signed up to speak and waited and waited and waited. Close to four hours later, the chairman called my name. The crowd had gone home, and four committee members remained. Bravely, I gave my testimony. The members were very polite, and after all that, I felt thrilled and proud that I had become a part of the political process.*

*I've created this guide to help others who, like me, feel strongly about being a voice of protection for the animals. I hope this guide will help make things a little easier for you- especially if this is your first time testifying.*

*I look forward to meeting you at the hearing. We probably will have a lot of time to talk while we wait for our big moment!*

*Sincerely,*

*Chris Zaleski*

\*Taken and modified from an original document by CVA volunteer Chris Zaleski

**Legislative Office Building Address and Website**

300 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT

Website: cga.ct.gov

**Directions to the Legislative Office Building**

**From I-84 East** - Take Exit 48- Capitol Avenue. At the end of the ramp, turn right onto Capitol Avenue. Take the first right past the Legislative Office Building. Go straight through the Stop sign and follow the road around to the back of the garage. Take a right into the garage through the entry marked for visitors.

**From I-84 West** - Take Exit 48, towards Asylum Street. Get in the middle lane of the ramp off the highway. Turn right but stay in the left lane. Quickly after that turn, you will veer off slightly to the left, onto Farmington Avenue. At the next light (also comes up quickly, the YWCA will be across the intersection from you), turn left onto Broad St. Go through the next two lights and under the highway. Turn left into the Legislative Office Building driveway (across from the Hartford Courant building). At the stop sign, turn left again and follow the

road to the back of the garage. Take a right through the entry marked for visitors. **From I-91 North or South -** Take Exit 29A, Capitol Avenue. Follow the short highway to the end (it curves a

lot). Do not take any of the exits. You will come to Pulaski Circle. Travel halfway around the circle and take a

right onto Elm Street. Go to the end of Elm Street and turn left at the light; you will be facing the Capitol building. Follow the street as it curves to the right around the Capitol (notice the statue of Lafayette on

your left). Go straight through the next two lights. Take the first right past the Legislative Office Building. Go straight through the Stop sign and follow the road around to the back of the garage. Take a right into the garage through the entry marked for visitors.

### **Parking at the Legislative Office Building**

Finding parking during the legislative session is very difficult. Limited, free parking is available in the

Legislative Office Building Garage's first floor. To get a space, you must arrive very early. Once parked, you can walk outside and follow the sidewalk into the building, or go up to the third floor of the garage and continue over the skywalk into the building. Guides are at both entrances.

Free, public parking is available on Hungerford Street, directly across Capitol Avenue from the LOB

driveway. Check the signs to be sure on which side of the street parking is allowed that day.

There is a private garage for parking on Oak Street (diagonally across from the LOB off Capitol Avenue) in the CT Education Association Building (across from the CT Supreme Court and Library). It costs money, but it is often the best option.

### **Once Inside the Building**

CVA sends out Action Alerts when people are needed to testify in support of a particular bill. The CVA Action Alerts will provide you with talking points and detail the rules governing the hearing, sign up plans and other pertinent information.

If you are testifying in person, once inside the building, find the committee room assigned to the public hearing. There is a guard right at the front door who can direct you.

Testimony can be sent electronically in advance of the hearing. It is the best way to get your statement seen by Committee members. The electronic address is on the Committee website or CVA will let people know where to send comments. Gone are the days when paper copies of your statement are needed. CVA will let you know if there are any changes prior to the start of the hearing.

Sign up for the hearing varies and depends on how many bills the Committee intends to hear. Sign up usually begins at 9:00 a.m. for morning hearings. The first hour of the hearing is reserved for public officials, other legislators, agency representatives, other elected officials. Then the committee chairs begin calling speakers from the public.

You will have only 3 minutes, but do not go over. A bell will ring when your time is up.

After your three minutes, committee members may have questions for you. Answer briefly and accurately. If you don't know an answer, say so and tell them that you will get back to them. Be polite and respectful.

## Writing Testimony

The following pages provide you with an example of a recently written testimony by a CVA representative. You can find all CVA's statements for all of 2019 bills on its website: [https://www.ctvotesforanimals.org/cva\\_bill\\_tracking\\_and\\_testimony](https://www.ctvotesforanimals.org/cva_bill_tracking_and_testimony) We also provide a template that you can use as a guide when creating your written testimony.

### Written Testimony vs. Oral Testimony:

The written testimony, which will be given to the committee members, is more detailed. The oral testimony is what you actually say to committee members.

You should not read your written testimony. While your oral testimony should be in line with your written testimony, it should be less formal, more natural. Whether sharing relevant personal experiences or professional expertise, you should look at the committee members while testifying and speak with conviction. *Remember, legislators spend all day listening to testimony. When you have your few minutes to testify, do so with heart instead of reading from a script. It will make a big difference.*

**Statement of Jo-Anne R Basile, Executive Director, Connecticut Votes for Animals  
In Opposition to A State Sales Tax on Veterinary Services (SB-877)  
Joint Committee on Finance, Revenue and Bonding**

**March 15, 2019**

Senate Co-Chairman John Fonfara and House Co-Chair Jason Rojas, honorable members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee.

CT Votes for Animals is a grass roots animal advocacy organization representing 3,000 citizens across the State of Connecticut. CVA members care deeply that Connecticut provides a safe and humane environment for all its animals. CVA speaks up for animals as a reminder to the public that a compassionate world is good for all and one in which we should all want to live.

CT Votes for Animals is strongly opposed to Governor Lamont's proposal to tax veterinary services for the hundreds of thousands of pets and their owner/guardians in the State. It was just a brief 4 years ago when then Governor Malloy proposed the same sales tax. It is astonishing that the budget office heard none of the cries by thousands of CT residents who said don't tax my pet's health care.

While it might seem to make common sense apparently it bears repeating. The overwhelming majority of pet owners consider their pet "family". Indeed for some their pet is their lifeline, for isolated seniors and others it is their trusty companion. Do not be confused. Pets are not a luxury and the medical services they require are not discretionary.

Veterinary medical care is critical for the health and safety of all animals. Services run the gamut from inoculating against communicable diseases, spay and neutering to control animal over populations to medical services for the treatment of illnesses, palliative care for a sick animal in distress. And very few residents carry

health insurance for their pets. While it is a growing area, in reality, pet insurance is just too expensive for most of Connecticut's pet owners.

Today, many pet guardians juggle the costs associated with caring for their pet. Adding even more to their expenses, risks people walking away from getting necessary medical care for their pet. Unlike some of the other services targeted in the Governor's bill, medical care for animals is not discretionary and it certainly is a not a luxury. It is a necessity and oftentimes a difficult cost for owners to meet. Imposing a sales tax on medical services for animals is an additional burden to Connecticut residents that will have negative consequences. And for those in most economic distress the additional costs will only give further reason to avoid or reduce those services. It also means that some animal owners will be forced to make very difficult decisions: forego treatment, skip vaccinations, or decline diagnostic tests, even though these services may prolong life or reduce suffering.

CT Votes for Animals wants to emphasize that the proposal before you is about taxing ***medical services for sentient beings***. And this tax can and will have a negative impact in the on-going health of animals. CT Votes for Animals strongly urges you to remove this tax from those you consider. In the immortal words of Mahatma Gandhi "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated." Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

#### TESTIMONY TEMPLATE

Testimony In (SUPPORT OF or OPPOSITION TO) House Bill No. xxxx

YOUR NAME, TOWN

YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION, IF ANY

Senator <Chair Name>, Representative <Co-Chair name> , I would like to thank the Environmental Committee for the Opportunity to express my concerns on House Bill xxx, <Name of the Bill>.

I am a registered voter in YOUR TOWN, and I am a SPECIFIC ROLE IN AFFILIATED ORGANIZATION (IF ANY).

WHY YOU CARE ABOUT THIS BILL, AND WHY COMMITTEE MEMBERS SHOULD SUPPORT/OPPOSE IT.

Examples (please use your own language/experiences/expertise):

*Example one – speak to first hand experiences*

*Another example if possible*

This bill would allow <BASED ON YOUR EXAMPLES, DESCRIBE HOW THIS BILL WILL HELP/HURT ANIMALS> .

THE USE OF BULLETS HELPS ORGANIZE YOUR THOUGHTS: XXX

XXX XXX XXX

INCLUDE A PERSONAL STORY THAT IS COMPELLING TO LAWMAKERS. END WITH A CALL TO ACTION REGARDING THE LEGISLATION:

E.g.,

*Please protect the constitutional rights of citizens – please do not allow animal rescuers to be treated like criminals.*

*I urge you (not or to) vote for this legislation.*

Thank you for opportunity to testify (or submit testimony) today,

INCLUDE YOUR NAME & ADDRESS.

### **Be Constructive While Waiting**

There is often a lot of time to kill while waiting for your turn to testify. So, make the best of it. Here are some tips on what you can do while you wait:

#### **Observe others and practice your testimony**

This is a great time to watch others give their testimony. Practice your message, your timing and perfect it. In this respect, the time you have to wait benefits you – by the time it's your turn, you will have perfected your testimony!

Also, if you hear another witness give testimony with which you do not agree, you can make a note for yourself and mention the fact that you disagree during your testimony. As long as you're respectful, it's very important that you share what you believe is the whole story with committee members.

#### **Meet – and “lobby” – your legislator.**

Know your legislators (representative and senator)! If you see them, approach them and

introduce yourself – do not be intimidated. They welcome input from constituents. In fact, if **you have a chance to speak to them, be sure to tell them what bills you are supporting or opposing**

**at the hearing , and ask them if you can count on them for their vote. There is nothing wrong with politely trying to get a commitment (be it to support or oppose a bill) from a legislator – professional lobbyists do this every day.**

#### **Leave a personal note**

Find out where your Senator's and Representative's offices are and leave a note. Legislators have aides who can help you make sure your note gets into your lawmaker's hands.

Your note can be simple: "*Dear Senator So-and-so, I was waiting to testify at the Environment Committee's public hearing today and thought I would stop by to introduce myself. I strongly support Bill No. 12345 (An Act to Protect Puppies and Kitties), and I hope you will help to get this important piece of legislation passed.*" (Be sure to leave your address so they know you're a constituent).

Your note accomplishes three things:

- 1) introduces you to your legislators,
- 2) informs them about legislation that matters to you, and
- 3) puts them on notice that you're counting on their support if this bill has the opportunity to be voted on by them.

### **Network**

There will be a lot of animal advocates at the hearing. Take some time to introduce yourself to other CT Votes for Animals members. It's great when you finally meet the person behind the email address.

### **Work/Read**

The legislative office building (LOB) has free wireless internet. Get some work done while you wait.

### **Have lunch or a snack**

The LOB has a great cafeteria with a fantastic veggie wrap! They also have a salad bar and lots of snacks.

**The LOB is a beautiful building and a place where you (and animal advocates) belong!**