

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

How to Testify at the Michigan Legislature: A Practical Guide for Families

Three minutes. That's often all the time a family gets in front of a legislative committee. Used well, it's enough time to change a vote. Here's exactly how to use it.

BY JIM PALASTY · 10 MIN READ · THREE MINUTES, USED WELL

3

MINUTES VERBAL TESTIMONY
TYPICALLY RUNS, AT MOST
COMMITTEE HEARINGS

Committee time is genuinely scarce. Three minutes, prepared and specific, is enough to make a real impression, if the time isn't wasted on general background a committee has already heard.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Know the mechanics before the hearing day

Committee hearings, sign-up sheets, and time limits all follow a predictable process worth understanding in advance.



STEP 2

Structure matters more than length

Three minutes of specific, well-organized testimony outperforms three minutes of general emotional appeal, every time.



STEP 3

The cost comparison argument is genuinely persuasive, used carefully

Concrete figures on institutional versus community-based care costs give a committee a hard number to weigh alongside the human story.

Your three minutes, structured

Opening (15 seconds)	Your name, your connection to the issue, direct and brief
The specific ask (30 seconds)	Exactly what you want the committee to do, stated plainly
Your family's story (90 seconds)	One concrete, specific example, not a general history
The data point (30 seconds)	One cited, sourced number that reinforces your ask
Closing (15 seconds)	Restate your ask, thank the committee, stop talking

THE THREE MINUTES THAT GOT A BILL AMENDED

“

Odessa had never spoken publicly before her first committee hearing, and she nearly talked herself out of it the morning of. She used exactly the structure in this guide: fifteen seconds of introduction, a direct ask, ninety seconds on her son's specific experience losing day program hours, one cost-comparison figure, and a fifteen-second close. A committee member referenced her testimony by name during the bill markup the following week. The provision she'd asked about was amended.

THREE PREPARED MINUTES FROM SOMEONE WHO'D NEVER SPOKEN PUBLICLY GOT REFERENCED BY NAME DURING A BILL MARKUP THE FOLLOWING WEEK.

What matters, at a glance

MICHIGAN SPECIFIC

How committee hearings actually work

Public hearings typically include a sign-up process, often same-day, and a strict time limit per speaker, commonly around three minutes.

Structure beats length, every time

A tightly organized three minutes covering a clear ask, a specific personal example, and a concrete number outperforms a rambling five minutes.

The cost comparison argument carries real weight

Community-based care costs roughly \$42,000 to \$70,000 annually per person, compared to over \$188,000 annually for institutional care, according to National Council on Disability data.

Bring a written copy to leave behind

A one-page written version of your testimony, left with committee staff, extends your three minutes well past the hearing room.

Committee members are people doing their jobs

Respectful, specific, prepared testimony tends to land better than testimony assuming bad faith on the part of any specific legislator.

Follow-up correspondence extends your impact

A brief thank-you note referencing your specific testimony, sent after the hearing, keeps your family's concern visible past the hearing day itself.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

☐ A specific bill identified and tracked, with its next hearing date known

☐ Three minutes of testimony written using the five-part structure

☐ At least two timed practice readings completed before the hearing

☐ A one-page written copy prepared to leave with committee staff

☐ A follow-up note sent to the committee after the hearing

YOUR MOVE

When you're preparing to testify, here is exactly what to do

1

Identify the specific bill and its next scheduled committee hearing.

2

Write your three minutes using the five-part structure above.

3

Practice reading it aloud with a timer at least twice before the hearing.

4

Arrive early enough to complete the sign-up process without rushing.

5

Bring a one-page written copy to leave with committee staff.

6

Send a brief thank-you follow-up note referencing your testimony afterward.

Three minutes is genuinely enough time, if it's used deliberately. Odessa's story is available to any family willing to prepare and show up.

LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY RESOURCES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BillTrack50 (billtrack50.com) helps identify relevant bills and their scheduled committee hearing dates in Michigan.

The Community Mental Health Association of Michigan (cmham.org) and Disability Rights Michigan (drmich.org) both track relevant legislation and can help identify current committee hearing schedules.

Informational only. Not legal or medical advice. Verify current program rules before acting.

JP

Jim Palasty

Jim Palasty is the founder of OASIS for Autism and a single father of an adult autistic daughter in Michigan.

OASISFORAUTISM.COM · BUILT FROM POST B130 · 2026-08-16 · PAGE 2 OF 2