



**January 2017**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This information is for individuals who appear before a parliamentary committee of the House of Commons.

The House of Commons creates committees, which do a large portion of parliamentary work. A committee is a working group made up of a limited number of Members of Parliament (MPs) who study bills or issues under the committee's jurisdiction for the House of Commons.

Committees regularly invite private citizens, experts, representatives of organizations, public servants and ministers to appear before them in order to elicit information (receive evidence) relevant to the study under consideration. These consultations allow witnesses to set out and clarify their points of view, which is often presented in a written brief, and gives MPs the opportunity to ask questions.

Witnesses are generally consulted during public proceedings; however, committees may hear witnesses in private (*in camera*) if the situation warrants such action.

For additional information on the work of committees, please see the [Committees Web site](#).

## **INVITATION TO APPEAR**

Committees select witnesses based largely on the type of study and the amount of time available.

The clerk of the committee contacts the witnesses selected to establish the date, time and place of the meeting. A confirmation form is sent and witnesses must confirm, as quickly as possible, the names and titles of the people who will appear before the committee.

When an organization is called upon to give evidence, it generally determines who will represent it at the meeting, although a committee may also request that a specific individual or office holder attend. Organizations should send to the meeting individuals who have the knowledge and expertise required to answer the MPs' questions.

If a witness declines an invitation to appear, a committee may issue a summons to that witness, should the circumstances so require.

## **SPECIAL NEEDS**

All parliamentary buildings and committee rooms are accessible to persons with mobility challenges and those using a wheelchair. It is recommended that witnesses with specific accommodation needs inform the clerk of the committee.

## **OPENING STATEMENT AT THE MEETING**

Witnesses may use various tools (handwritten or typed notes, PowerPoint) to make it easier to present their opening statement to the committee. Upon request, witnesses can also use audiovisual equipment (House of

Commons laptops with Microsoft Windows, with or without audio and Internet, screens and projectors) to make their presentation. Witnesses who wish to make use of this audiovisual equipment must inform the clerk of the committee when they confirm their appearance or at least **five (5) working days** in advance of their appearance. The clerk of the committee can provide them with guidelines to this effect.

### **SUBMISSION OF A WRITTEN BRIEF**

A brief is an opportunity to submit, in writing, opinions, observations and recommendations on the subject under consideration by the committee. Any individual or organization can submit a brief to a committee, even if that person or organization has not had the opportunity to appear before the committee. Witnesses that appear before a committee are encouraged to submit a brief to support their presentation, but it is not mandatory for them to do so.

For more information on the requirements for the submission of briefs, contact the clerk of the committee in question or consult [the Guide for Submitting Briefs to House of Commons Committees](#) on the House of Commons Committees Web site.

### **DOCUMENTS USED BY WITNESSES DURING THE MEETING**

If witnesses use speaking notes (even if they are handwritten), they must usually submit **five (5) copies** to the clerk. These copies will assist with the simultaneous interpretation of the witness's testimony.

If witnesses would like to distribute documents other than a brief to committee members, they are asked to submit several copies in both official languages to the clerk upon their arrival at the meeting room. The clerk will confirm the exact number of copies required and will take care of distributing the documents.

### **APPEARANCE IN A PARLIAMENTARY BUILDING**

Committee meetings take place in various buildings around Parliament Hill. It is recommended that witnesses arrive at the committee meeting room at least **fifteen (15) minutes** before they are scheduled to appear. Please allow sufficient time (15 to 30 minutes) to get through security screening conducted at building entrances and please note that photo identification will be needed. The clerk will meet witnesses at the meeting room and show them where to sit.

### **APPEARANCE BY VIDEOCONFERENCE**

For various reasons, committees often decide to hear witnesses by videoconference rather than meeting with them in person. In such cases, witnesses will be invited to go to a building (e.g., a hotel) that has the equipment necessary to host a videoconference. Generally, the location will be as close as possible to the witness's place of residence. Witnesses will be given all necessary instructions when they confirm their appearance. An appearance via videoconference has the same value, scope and protection as an in-person appearance.

### **APPEARANCE BEFORE A COMMITTEE OUTSIDE OTTAWA**

Sometimes a committee may travel outside the Ottawa area to hold hearings. Witnesses will then be invited to go to the location of the meeting (usually a hotel) to present their testimony to the committee. Witnesses will be given all the necessary information (location, date, time) when they confirm their appearance.

### **MEETING PROCEEDINGS**

Each organization or witness appearing as an individual has a limited amount of time (usually **between five (5) and ten (10) minutes**) at the beginning of the meeting to make an opening statement. This time can be used to clarify, modify or elaborate on the statements made in the written brief (consult [the Guide for Submitting Briefs to House of Commons Committees](#) or more information).

It is recommended that witnesses speak at a moderate pace since their testimony is being interpreted and transcribed. Witnesses can speak in the official language of their choice (English or French).

After the witness's opening statement, members of the committee will ask questions. These questions usually last for a limited period of time and are asked in a predetermined order. In every case, the Chair directs the meeting by turning the time over to members of the committee and witnesses.

Please note that, traditionally, members of the committee should be addressed through the Chair. For example, "Thank you Mr. Chair. I would like to reply to the member that...".

## **SWEARING-IN OF WITNESSES**

Any witness appearing before a committee may be required to take an oath or make a solemn affirmation. While witnesses are not usually sworn in, the decision to swear in a witness is entirely at the discretion of the committee. Witnesses have the right to be accompanied by legal counsel if they so desire; however, the role of the legal representative must be strictly advisory and the representative cannot ask questions or reply on behalf of the witness.

## **PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGE**

Witnesses appearing before a parliamentary committee are protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that nothing said by a witness in his or her official testimony before a committee, whether it be in person or by videoconference, may be used in a court of law. This immunity no longer applies if the same testimony is repeated publicly outside a parliamentary meeting.

## **EXPENSE CLAIMS**

When witnesses must travel to give testimony before a committee, the committee will usually reimburse expenses for one or two witnesses per organization, upon request. Witnesses who wish to claim travel and living expenses must submit an expense claim form within **sixty (60) days** of their appearance.

## **CONTACTS**

The **clerk** is the chief procedural and administrative adviser to the Chair and to the members of the committee. The clerk organizes meetings and calls witnesses. The clerk will inform witnesses of the committee's requirements and the procedure for appearing before a committee. The **committee analyst** is the subject matter expert and can answer questions about the content and direction of the committee's study.

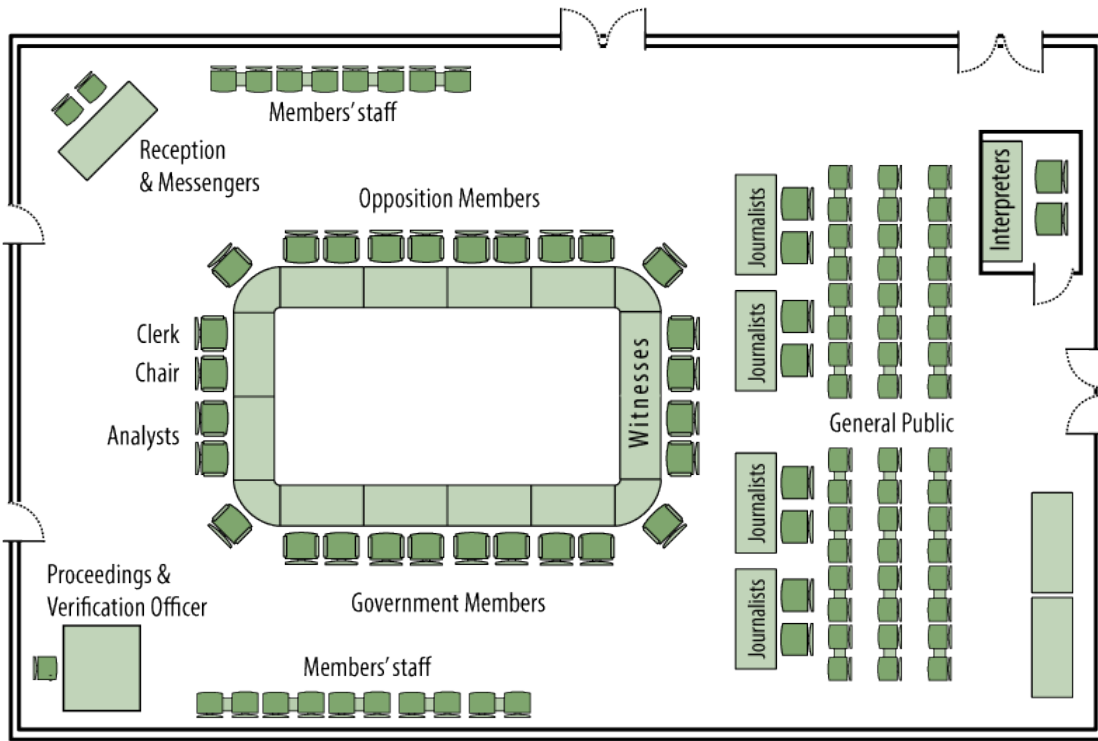
## **RECORDING OF THE MEETING**

The minutes of meetings and transcripts of testimony (called "Evidence") are available on the Committees Web site. An unrevised transcript is usually available in the days following a meeting by submitting a request to the clerk of the committee.

Audio recordings are made of all public meetings and some meetings are televised. In both cases, live or archived copies of the proceedings are available on the Parliament of Canada Web site at

<http://parlvu.parl.gc.ca/>.

## EXAMPLE OF A COMMITTEE ROOM



## COMMITTEE ROOM LOCATIONS

