

COLAGE

How to Testify for Queer Families

A Testimony Guide to
Speaking Up for Our Families

Public Testimony Explained

Public testimony is a powerful opportunity to let elected officials know how you feel about proposed policy or legislation. While voting is one way you can influence *who* represents you, giving testimony is an opportunity for you to influence *how* they represent you. You can offer testimony before a state legislature, city council, school board, or other government agency or commission where your words can directly impact potential rules or laws. These words can be even more powerful when they speak of your lived experiences. For instance, if you or your family have experienced harm or difficulties because of outdated laws or discriminatory policies, sharing your story can make a big difference to help policy makers better understand why queer protections are needed and how they should move forward.

The legislative process and petitioning for queer policy is often technical and can be quite difficult to navigate, just like how normally navigating our families and the ties that hold us together can be. Telling your story as a COLAGER can shed light on the human cost of legal ambiguity and discrimination, especially for issues covered by The Queerspawn Agenda. In short, giving your testimony is about making it clear that family is not one-size-fits-all and our laws need to reflect that.

A Few Tips Before You Testify

- Know the bill: Understand what the bill does and how it affects you and your family. Is it likely to have a positive or negative impact? What would you like to say about it? This could be around parentage, schools, healthcare, adoption, or any queer family matter that needs addressing.
- Know your format, venue, and time: Find out if testimony is in-person, virtual, or written-only. If in person, where is it being held? Also know when the hearing to offer testimony will take place. Other helpful tips:
 - Know how much time you have to testify. Tailor your message to the time constraints. For longer testimony, submit it in writing in case it doesn't fit the limit. Written testimony may have a different submission deadline, so be mindful.
 - You may be able to find all of this information on the appropriate website for the event, such as the state legislature or the school board, for example.

- Know your audience: Learn who's on the committee and their stance on this or similar issues. Your testimony can be more effective when it speaks to the concerns or desires of those hearing or reading it.
- Print and prep: Bring a few copies of your testimony and practice it. You never know when you want to make a change and don't want to lose or forget the important things you have to say!

Structuring Your Testimony - COLAGEr Style

- Start with who you are: Introduce yourself, your pronouns, where you're from, and what makes you a COLAGEr.
- Name your values: What beliefs guide your testimony? Why did you show up to the meeting today?
- Tell your story: Share a relevant personal experience. This helps to demonstrate the actual need and impact on not only your life, but other queerspawn, queerparents, and queer families.
- Make your ask/demand: Be specific about what action you want taken. If applicable, state how you would like that action to be carried out.
- End on optimism: Conclude with a positive vision for the future.

Best Practices

These apply whether you are testifying in person, virtually, or submitting written comments.

- Testifying In-Person: Be early, clear, and concise. Respect decorum and your time limit. Dress appropriately! Although it may not be necessary, it helps to dress business casually or formally to better communicate your point.
- Testifying Virtually: Ensure good lighting, clear sound, and a simple background. Make sure you are in a space that will limit your distractions.
- Check legislative rules to see if registration is required to testify.
- Navigating Hard Questions: Stick to your truth and say "I don't know" if unsure. It's okay not to know. The best thing you can do is be honest—with yourself and those you're addressing. Use your time wisely; don't waste it on tough questions.
- After You Testify: Remember to thank the committee and follow up if needed.

State Specific Policy Reference: Parentage Laws & LGBTQ+ Families

While testimony topics will vary, many COLAGers and queer families are impacted by prejudice parentage laws. The following examples highlight how family recognition policies are different across different states and show the importance of how disparities can affect your testimony. This is not a complete list, just a few examples from places where we have seen recent legislative activity.

Understanding your state's legal landscape is an important part of preparing to testify. These categories show whether each state provides access to a Voluntary Acknowledgement of Parentage (VAP), confirmatory/second-parent adoption, and/or explicit legal protections against discrimination in adoption.

State	VAPs for LGBTQ+ Families	Confirmatory Adoption	Second-Parent Adoption	Anti-Discrimination in Adoption
California	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Colorado	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Connecticut	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Texas	No	No	Yes (if married, generally)	No
Vermont	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pennsylvania	No	No	Yes	No
Rhode Island	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Georgia	No	No	Yes (if married, generally)	No
Florida	No	No	Yes (if married, generally)	No

For a deeper look at parentage, keep an eye out for COLAGE's upcoming white paper. It will explore how parentage policy shapes our lives and outline our goals for strengthening our community through advocacy. The paper will also break down key terms and legal jargon, offering clearer explanations of the issues at stake. You'll be able to find it soon on COLAGE's website.

In the meantime, here is a link to our recent report, [“Relationships at Risk: Why We Need to Update State Parentage Laws to Protect Children and Families”](#) (in collaboration with MAP, GLAD Law, NCLR, and Family Equality).

Final Thoughts and Sample Testimony

You don’t need to be perfect. You just need to be present. Your story matters. You can use this as a starting point:

Chairperson _____ and members of the Committee,

My name is _____, and I live in _____. I’m here today to speak in [position on legislation: support, opposition, etc.] that affects LGBTQ+ families like mine.

I was raised by [two moms / a queer parent / LGBTQ+ caregivers], and my family, like many others, has had to deal with [insert personal, relevant experience like school exclusion, healthcare denial, parentage issues, etc.]. In states like Minnesota and Rhode Island, policymakers have already implemented modernized parentage laws to ensure that all children are protected, while in other places, families continue to face legal uncertainty in acquiring parentage of their children.

Laws and policies should recognize and respect families like ours and work to fight for us and not against us.

I urge you to support this bill so that all families are treated with fairness and dignity.

Thank you.

Resources:

- [Example testimony by Iowa Senate candidate Zach Wahls](#)
- [A4TE’s How to Testify for Trans Rights](#): This guide inspired us to make our own specific to the COLAGE community and was a fantastic template!
- [People with Trans Parents: A Resource Guide](#)

- [A Guide for People Who Have LGBTQ+ Parents and Were Born via Donor Conception and/or Surrogacy](#)
- [FAQ: Voluntary Acknowledgment of Parentage \(VAP\) - GLAD Law](#)
- [LGBTQ Paths to Parentage Security - GLAD Law & Mombian](#)
- [Queerspawn Resource Project](#)