

# Committee Hearings Information for Witnesses



***Important: Please read the following notes before giving evidence.***

**Full Name:** (Title) (First Name) (Last Name)

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**Title of Position Held:**

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**Business Name and Address:**

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**Telephone:** **Email:**

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**Signature:** **Date:**

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## **Introduction**

1. A committee hearing is a proceeding in Parliament. As such, you must not deliberately mislead the committee and you must respect the members of the committee and the committee's orders and procedures. If you do not comply with these requirements, you may be subject to legal penalties.

## **What happens at a hearing?**

2. Committees are made up of members of Parliament. Usually there are 3-10 members on a committee.
3. You will be escorted to the committee's meeting room by one of the committee's staff. After you are seated, the chairperson of the committee may ask you to take an oath or affirmation. The chairperson will then ask you:
  - a. to state your full name, address and the capacity in which you appear before the committee; and
  - b. if you have read and understood the information contained in this document.
4. The chairperson may invite you to make an opening statement to the committee.
5. The chairperson will then ask you a series of questions, following which other members of the committee may ask you more questions. With limited exceptions (discussed below) you must answer questions you are asked.
6. The chairperson may invite you to make any additional comments in closing.

## **Parliamentary privilege**

7. Parliamentary privilege provides protection for what is said in parliamentary proceedings, so that, for instance, what is said in such proceedings may not be the basis of a suit in defamation. However, it is only the authorised Hansard report, or that of an accredited media reporter, which is protected when what is said in the proceeding is related outside the confines of Parliament. Similarly, parliamentary privilege means that what you have said to a committee cannot be used against you in civil or criminal proceedings in a court or tribunal. The purpose of parliamentary privilege is to enable parliamentarians and witnesses to speak candidly without fear of legal repercussions.

## **Your entitlements**

8. Subject to order, any person examined before a Committee is entitled to:
- a. access to relevant documents before and during examination;
  - b. benefit of counsel;
  - c. request that the evidence be deemed private or *in camera*;
  - d. be informed prior to the examination of the right of objection provided by section 7 of the *Parliamentary Privileges Act 1891*;
  - e. a reasonable opportunity to rebut allegations of criminal, improper or unethical conduct made against the witness if the allegations are relevant to the Committee's inquiry;
  - f. a reasonable opportunity to correct errors of transcription in a transcript of evidence;
  - g. an opportunity to provide supplementary or new evidence; and
  - h. any additional entitlements as determined by the Council.

## **Is your evidence public or private?**

9. Most committee hearings are public. In other words, members of the public and the media may attend the hearings and the proceedings may be reported. In contrast, a committee may conduct a private hearing, which means that members of the public and the media may not attend. If you are uncertain as to whether your hearing is private or public, ask the committee's staff before the hearing or the chairman of the committee before you start giving evidence.
10. It is important that any request for the committee to prohibit publication of all or part of your evidence, or your identity, be made *prior* to giving the relevant evidence. You should be prepared to state why you want your evidence to remain confidential. If the committee grants your request, the public and media will be excluded from the hearing.
11. The committee may also decide that all, or part, of the hearing should be in private, particularly if the evidence adversely reflects on a third person or the matter being investigated is subject to legal proceedings.
12. You should note that the committee retains the power to publish any private evidence. The Legislative Council may also authorise publication. This means that even your private evidence may become public.
13. The Committee may decide to broadcast the public hearing on the internet. If this is the case the hearing will also be recorded. If you object to the hearing being broadcast, you should advise staff at the earliest opportunity and provide an explanation for your request not to broadcast the hearing. The Committee will consider your request and you will be advised of their decision.

**If you are a public servant**

14. Public servants appearing before a committee in that capacity are entitled to refuse to answer a question asking to give an opinion on a matter of policy. The committee must direct all such questions to the responsible Minister.

**You must not disclose evidence given in private session**

15. You must not publish or disclose any evidence given to a committee in private session unless that evidence has been reported to the Legislative Council in a public document. Premature publication or disclosure may:
- a. constitute a contempt of the Legislative Council; and
  - b. mean that the publication or disclosure of the relevant material is not subject to parliamentary privilege.

**Transcript of your evidence**

16. A transcript of your evidence will be made and sent to you for correction of typographical and transcription errors. Please see the letter that will accompany the uncorrected transcript in this regard.

**Threats or intimidation**

17. If you have been threatened or intimidated by any person in respect of giving your evidence to the committee, you should immediately inform the committee or one of its staff.