

Attending and Testifying at a Legislative Public Hearing: *GMO Labeling, H.3242, An Act establishing the genetic engineering transparency food and seed labeling act*

Members of the public get an opportunity to comment on bills at legislative committee public hearings. You can testify about why you support (or oppose) a bill and describe how a proposal for a new law could affect the lives of you, your community and Massachusetts residents. You have the power to share information and a personal perspective that can influence how a legislative committee deals with a bill. Your story matters!

Background

- Committees usually deal with a group of bills on the same general topic at one legislative hearing. On September 22, 2015 the [GMO labeling bill, H.3242](#) will be heard before the [Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture](#) with only a few other bills.
- Anyone can testify at a hearing.
- Advocacy organizations describe the impact the bill would have on certain groups.
- Experts share data to strengthen the reasons for supporting or opposing the bill.
- Citizens share personal experiences and explain their positions on a bill. This type of testimony is essential – it demonstrates the depth of public support (or opposition), provides real-life context, and shows why the bill is important to individuals.

What to Prepare and Expect

- If you are attending the hearing you should arrive 20-30 minutes before the planned beginning of the hearing. It will take significant time to get through security and metal detectors. Find the hearing room and sign-in on the sheet provided. This can be for those presenting oral testimony and those submitting written testimony. You can also attend the hearing and show support just by your presence. There will be coalition volunteers outside hearing room to answer any questions and provide lapel stickers. The Hearing will be in **Gardner Auditorium at 1PM at the State House, Tuesday September 22**. Also note we are planning a **Meet Up and Press Event at 11.30 on the on the Boston Common** before the hearing. People will gather at 11:30 for **Ben and Jerry's ice cream** and information. If you are able, your presence at the event would be helpful.
- You don't need to testify to help and show support. By filling the hearing room with supporters we can also demonstrate the overwhelming and broad support we have. Help us fill the hearing room.

- **Written Testimony.** Everyone can submit written testimony. This is a written letter or statement on why you think the committee should pass the gmo labeling bill. If you are testifying orally you should bring a few copies of your testimony to give to the committee and others who may want it (media, coalition partners ect). If you are unable to attend or just planning on submitting written testimony you can give to the committee on the day of the hearing or email it ahead of the hearing to address below. Written testimony can be written as a letter addressed to the Chairs and the “Members of the Committee”. Make sure to prominently indicate the bill number, whether your testimony is in support or opposition to the bill.
 - For Example: To Chairwoman Gobi, Chairman Schmid and members of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture.
 - I am here today to testify in favor of the GMO labeling bill, H.3242
 - Written testimony should be emailed to Serafina.zeringo@mahouse.gov and Henry.kahn@masenate.gov
 - Include your name, address and your reason why you care about or support the GMO labeling bill.
- Hearings do not last for a set amount of time: they can be brief or they can last for hours. You may wish to bring water in case the hearing runs long. Last session the GMO labeling hearing lasted 8 hours but we don’t expect that this year.
- Witnesses/experts may be invited to testify or organized in pre-set panels. The Committee will determine how they are calling those wishing to testify. Sometimes in order of sign up, sometimes alternating pro and con ect. Remember that there will be other bills heard at the hearing and we will need to wait for H.3242 to be called. It is customary for elected and other public officials to be invited to testify “out of turn” or whenever they show up.
- **When testifying orally**, thank the committee for the opportunity to testify, and provide your name and any relevant title or affiliation. Mention the bill number and whether you support or oppose the bill before setting out your reasons or providing your personal perspective. The urge the committee to pass the bill from their committee quickly.
- Individual **testimony should last no more than 3 minutes, and ideally less.** Introduce yourself to the committee and tell a brief personal story – and the reasons why you support the bill. Stories personalize the legislation to committee members and allow them to relate to how people are impacted by the problem or would be impacted by the bill. You want elected officials to understand why you are passionate about the issue and how it impacts their constituents. If you have more to say than can be conveyed in 3 minutes, it should be in your written testimony.
- The GMO labeling coalition will be **organizing some panels of experts** to make sure the key messages are hit. Even in the case of an expert panel, each testifier should keep under 3 minutes and we will work to make sure your primary messages are diverse. Please bring written

testimony, on letterhead with your contact info, and any supporting documents to give to the committee.

- After you give your testimony, you may be asked follow-up questions by members of the committee. Don't be afraid to say that you don't know the answer. You can offer to try to get more information for the legislator and provide it later.
- Remember the bill was passed from this committee in the last legislative session, the Senate Chair Anne Gobi is one of the 154 legislative cosponsors and a majority of committee members have also cosponsored the bill. We would want to thank them for their support last session and urge them to pass the bill quickly this session from their committee.

DO

- Do address the Chairs as Chairman/Chairwoman and the other members as 'Representative' or 'Senator' and check how to pronounce their names. (list of members below)
- Do refer to the bill title and bill number. The GMO labeling bill, H.3242, *An Act establishing the genetic engineering transparency food and seed labeling act*
- Do focus your testimony on the point/s that matter most to you. The coalition will make sure the key points are presented.
- Do be respectful and professional.

DON'T

- Don't read from your written testimony. It's better to talk with committee members and to look at them, not at your papers.
- Don't try to answer a question when you don't know the answer. You can offer to get more information for the legislator.
- Don't argue with or criticize legislators who have different views.
- Don't cheer or jeer anyone testifying.

State House Website: <https://malegislature.gov/>

Members of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture



Senator Chair, Anne Gobi



House Chair, Paul Schmidt

[Full List of Committee Members here](#)

9.14.15