

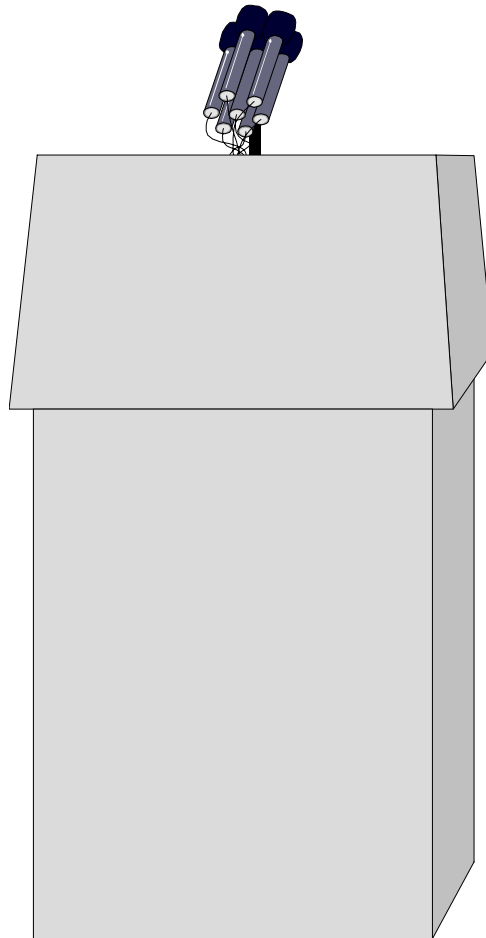
# **Budget Advocacy**

## **P r o j e c t**

accountability \$ collaboration \$ revenue maximization

Updated: *March 18, 2003*

# **Tips for Preparing and Delivering Testimony**



DC Action for Children

1616 P St. NW, Suite 420 Washington, DC 20036

(202) 234-9404 \$ (202) 234-9108 fax \$ [dcaction@dckids.org](mailto:dcaction@dckids.org) \$ [www.dckids.org](http://www.dckids.org)



## DC Action for Children

Founded in 1992, DC Action for Children (DC ACT) is an independent and non-profit multi-issue children's advocacy group. DC ACT believes that every child in the District of Columbia should have the opportunity to reach his or her potential. DC ACT's mission is to improve conditions for children and families in the District.

DC ACT pursues its mission by:

- Informing citizens, public officials, and service providers about issues and policies affecting children and families in the District of Columbia.
- Holding the government accountable and promoting public policies that improve the lives of children
- Mobilizing an informed, city-wide constituency for children
- Empowering families and neighborhoods to advocate for children

DC ACT is governed by its Board of Directors:

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# Writing to Members of the City Council/Mayor



## Addressing Correspondence to the Council:

The Honorable (first and last name)  
Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Councilmember \_\_\_\_\_:

### **NOTE:**

When writing to the Chair of a committee, it is appropriate to address them as:

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Dear Madam Chair:

## Addressing Correspondence to the Mayor:

The Honorable (first name and last name)  
Mayor, District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mr. Mayor OR Dear Mayor Williams:

## Format of the Letter:

### First Paragraph

1. Introduction: Statement about the organization from which you are writing (including the Ward in which you are located, the population served, etc.)
2. Why you are writing

### Middle Paragraph (s)

1. More detail and/or
2. Recommendations, action you want taken

### Last Paragraph

1. Summary of issue
2. Offer assistance — provide phone and e-mail

### Other valuable pointers:

1. Be courteous, to the point, and include key information, using examples to support your position. You may also include recommendations if you have suggested changes in the legislation.
2. Address only one issue in each letter and, if possible, keep the length to one page.

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# Sample letter

September 17, 2001

The Honorable Sandra Allen  
Chair, Committee on Human Services  
Council of the District of Columbia  
1350 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Madame Chair:

As you know, DC Action for Children is a non-profit, multi-issue advocacy organization dedicated to improving conditions for children, youth and families in the District of Columbia. Toward that end, **we join other organizations in requesting that you and Councilmember Graham convene a joint hearing on homelessness** this fall to investigate two very important things: First, the status of the Multi-Year Budget Plan for Homeless Services for the Department of Human Services and second, the District's readiness for the upcoming hypothermia season.

You are well aware that the government did not provide detailed spending plans for homeless services for FY 2002 for families during the budget process; for that reason, it is imperative that the city responds now. What we are interested in learning is how the city will actually spend available funding; this is significant because there continues to be carryover funds despite a present need to serve children, youth and families in the sorts of shelter and housing and with the array of service needs.

It is similarly imperative that the city detail its hypothermia plans for FY 2002 given the failure of the system to provide accessible shelter to the range of those in need. While no children or youth succumbed to the freezing weather during FY 2001, families are nonetheless facing a shortage of emergency shelter. DC Village in past years has been the city's hypothermia shelter for families. Though not currently at full capacity, it has been over the summer, raising the issue of an additional facility for winter.

Given that hypothermia season begins on November 1, it is critical that light be shed on these important issues so that we can be assured that life-saving services are in place before cold weather arrives. Thank you for your prompt attention to this critical issue. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call us at 234-9404.

Sincerely,

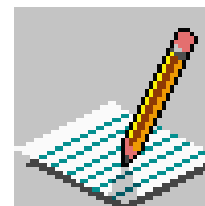
Angela M. Jones  
Executive Director

Suzanne E. Cambria, MSW  
Director of Public Policy

**Notes:**

1. Be sure the letter is on letterhead.
2. Be sure to include the phone number and address for a contact person if the letter is from an informal or formal collaborative effort.

# Formatting Written Testimony and Statements for the Record



- I. Title
  - a. Can either be on a page of its own or on the top of the first page and include:
    1. Your name, position and organization
    2. Committee before which you are testifying or to which you are submitting a statement for the record
    3. Subject on which you are submitting testimony (i.e., Bill 12-1999, FY 1999 DHS budget hearing)
    4. Date on which you are submitting the testimony/statement
- II. First Paragraph
  - a. Introduction
    1. Good afternoon (morning)
    2. Who you are
    3. What you do
    4. Where you're from
    5. Information about the organization or yourself
  - b. Why you are testifying/submitting a statement for the record
    1. For budget and oversight hearings, include the agency(ies) of concern (APRA, DCRA, etc.) as well as specific concerns with examples
    2. For public hearings/roundtables on bills, include the bill number and title, specific concerns with examples and the potential impact (positive or negative)
- III. Recommendations
  - a. Be specific
  - b. Tie to concerns and impact
- IV. Conclusion
  - a. Thank the chair and the committee for the opportunity to comment
  - b. Offer assistance — Include a statement such as “If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them.” If you are submitting a statement for the record, include the names of people who can respond to questions as well as the numbers at which they can be reached.

## Technical Points:

1. Spacing should be 1.5 or double-spaced.
2. Bring copies for the committee (the hearing notice indicates the number). Also, bring copies to distribute to the government and the audience.

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***Testimony***  
**on the GAO report regarding**  
**weaknesses in the implementation of the city's**  
**financial management system**

**before the Committee on Finance and Revenue and the**  
**Committee of the Whole**

**by Suzanne E. Cambria, MSW**  
**Director of Public Policy**  
**DC Action for Children**

**May 14, 2001**

Good morning Chairman Cropp and Chairman Evans. Good morning, members of the Committee on Finance and Revenue and the Committee of the Whole. I am Susie Cambria, Director of Public Policy at DC Action for Children. As you also know, DC ACT is an independent, non-profit, multi-issue advocacy organization dedicated to improving conditions for children, youth and their families in the District of Columbia. I am pleased to have this opportunity to present our views on GAO report GAO-01-489, "District of Columbia: Weaknesses in Financial Management System Implementation." I am testifying today because DC Action for Children has been engaged in systems reform and budget advocacy since we were founded in 1992. Today I will speak about how the financial management system has impacted the budget process.

You may remember from testimony we delivered throughout the FY 2002 budget process that we started our remarks by commenting on the shortcomings of the proposed budget; two of these are pertinent to the topic before us today:

The budget lacks information the public needs to make an informed determination about the adequacy of program funding. The information needed to make such a determination includes baseline information, specific goals (rather than NA and TBD), program-level funding, and spending on specific types of issues (such as out-of-school time) across the budget. The lack of detail is especially frustrating in light of the mayor's commitment to a transparent budget.

The need for program-based budgeting. DC ACT, the Fair Budget Coalition, the Human Needs First Campaign, and a host of other organizations and coalitions have regularly advocated for real budgeting for a number of years. While the mayor's proposed FY 2002 budget started to link funding to programs, it failed to provide details that advocates and others would find useful: what investment is required to perform specific services that will reach a specific number of people. Exactly. (Excerpted from various FY 2002 budget statements.)

To be frank, our criticism of the city's budget process has never revolved around the city's financial management system — it never had to. However, our limited knowledge about this area does not preclude us from commenting on how an improved system would allow us — and others — to better determine how the District's budget plans to meet the needs of children, youth and families. We believe that only when agencies can report actual costs of programs or services can the city begin to budget realistically. That is, if budgets are to be cut, we know the implications. Likewise, if budgets are increased, we know how many more individuals can be served. DC ACT expects that systems work so that services work for the city's residents. What this means, practically, is that IMA know the cost of implementing a home visitation program. It also means that OTR knows what an outreach campaign around the DC EITC will cost. It means linking dollars to goals and outcomes. And, it means determining after the fact what was spent and what was accomplished. Our understanding from the GAO report is that this planning and evaluation cannot be done because the financial management system was not implemented correctly or completely. Insofar as future budgeting is concerned, DC ACT urges the OCFO and others to address those issues (read, fix the problems) raised in the GAO report. While we understand the Mayor Williams has taken umbrage with the report, many of the points are valid and we hope that in the best interest of the residents of the city that the problems will be fixed.

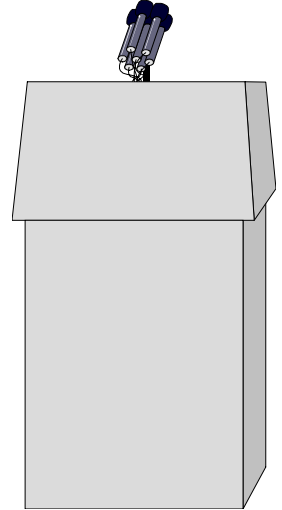
Thank you for this opportunity to present our views on the GAO's report on the city's financial management system. Should you have any questions, now or later, we would be more than happy to answer them.

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# Testifying

Here is a list of technical suggestions that will make your verbal testimony most effective:

1. **Summarize your written statements** – The committee staff will enter the written statement into the record.
2. **Respect the time limits** – Keep your remarks within the time allotted. You may be up there longer if the committee members ask you questions.
3. **Be germane** – Stay on the topic of the hearing.
4. **Speak clearly and close to the microphone.**
5. **Bring copies for the committee** – The hearing notice notes the number of copies to be provided — bring them. If you can't, provide one copy the day before the hearing and the committee staff will make copies.
6. **Bring copies to distribute to the audience and the government.**



## Other helpful hints:

1. Before you leave for the hearing, call the committee to determine if the hearing will be starting on time.
2. If your organization has buttons, wear one.
3. Unless you want others to see your expressions, do not sit in the sight line of the camera capturing the witnesses.
4. *Remember.* You are not only testifying to the committee — you are addressing the community: hearings are televised live and are replayed by cable on on-demand video via computer. Use this as an opportunity to educate the community on the problem and the solution.