

Suggestions for Creating a Trauma Informed Committee Hearing

This list was compiled with the input of a group of multidisciplinary professionals who are working with trauma. Regardless of what brings a person to a hearing, many people have experienced trauma that may or may not be apparent. These suggestions are intended to provide a framework for creating a more welcoming capitol environment.

Suggested Opening Statement for Judiciary Committee Chair

"We'd like to inform audience members, those preparing to testify, and members of the committee that information shared in this hearing may be hard to hear, upsetting, or re-traumatizing for some people. In an effort to make the hearing room more comfortable for all who are interested in these bills, we are offering some guidance."

Confidentiality in the stories you share

"If you wish to offer testimony that includes details of a story that is *not* your own lived experience, please consider whether you have consent to share the details you wish to share. It's possible they are in the room, and you don't know it or that someone shares a similar story and will think you are talking about them. So please be considerate in your testimony."

The impact of graphic details

"If you intend to offer testimony that includes graphic details of violence or harm, whether yours or someone else's, please notify the audience in advance so that people can choose to leave the room if they wish. Please know that if you hear this warning or if you want to avoid any content that you don't want to hear, you are free to leave at any time - even if you are up here testifying."

Be respectful to people who are testifying

"If you want to talk with someone who is here to testify for a bill, but you don't know them, please be respectful. That person may be nervous, and that nervousness can be deepened in the face of confrontation and conflict. Please be respectful of everyone who is here today - even if you disagree with them."

Your story, your choice

"If you have signed up to testify, you are welcome to change your mind at any point either before or during testimony. This is not a courtroom, and you are welcome to change your mind about testifying or leaving the room at any time.

We'd also like to remind everyone present that the information shared in these hearings is public record and is recorded. It is also possible that media are present in the room?"

Suggested Possible Closing Statement

"Thank you to everyone who shared their story today. Sharing can be both empowering and draining. Please take care of yourself today once you leave and seek support if you need it.

We are working to improve our capitol culture at all levels, so if you have input about today's process or if you felt threatened or harassed today, please notify my office. We want to make sure we are creating an open and welcoming capitol culture, and we will handle your concerns confidentially."

Further Consideration for Creating Welcoming Hearing Rooms

Be prepared to interrupt harassment of people who come to testify

People who have experienced trauma are often very nervous about testifying and may be reliving a traumatic or harmful experience. Some advocates have approached these folks in the past to engage in argument about policy, but that experience can be extremely stressful and re-traumatizing.

If you see harassment of people who are coming to testify, and they seem upset, you can interrupt this interaction by simply saying, *"I want to check - are you okay? Do you need a break?"* To the person talk with them, it can be useful to say, *"Please make sure they have the support they need and want to engage in this conversation now."*

Provide options for how people who have experienced trauma can share their story

Consider providing alternate means of oral testimony (phone, video) for those who feel too vulnerable/at risk to testify in person or may be geographically more distant. This also allows them to have more access to support after the hearing. You can also remind people of the ability to submit written testimony if they are too upset to testify and hold the record open for them to do so.

Ensuring consent of victims/survivors to share their story

Sometimes personal stories about harm are shared for show value as a shorthand to establish the foundation of the testifying person's expertise. This should only be done with the consent of the survivor whose story is being shared. That person may in fact be in the room; likewise, if someone with a similar experience is in the room, they may be very upset by a graphic retelling.

You can ask, *"Does the person whose story I am sharing know I am doing so today with this level of detail? Will it be traumatizing for that person or someone with a similar experience to be pained or confused by this story?"*

Supporting trauma responses after the hearing

It's easy to get fired up when advocating for justice, forgetting that after the hearing, a person who has relived a traumatic experience can be upset and scared.

After an emotional testimony, you can say to the person, *"Thank you. Please take care of yourself when you leave here today. Sharing can be both empowering and draining. Thank you again."*



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If you have questions about these suggestions, please contact
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