Speak Up and Speak Out By Doing a Witness Slip

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Self Advocates Becoming Empowered and Self Advocates Resource and Technical Assistance Center

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The Self Advocacy Resource and Technical Assistance Center or SARTAC works to strengthen the self-advocacy movement by helping self-advocacy organizations create more leadership opportunities for all members. This publication is designed to help self-advocates and their allies better understand policy issues that affect their lives.

A Message from Tavarus Wesley,
2026 SABE SARTAC Fellow



I made this resource because I think more people need to learn about Witness Slips. It will help everyone learn about Witness Slips, why they are important, and how to do them.

Some self-advocates do not know what Witness Slips are. Some know about them but do not know how to fill them out.

Some staff know about Witness Slips, and some do not. Sometimes staff do not tell self-advocates about Witness Slips.

I learned this from a survey that I asked people to fill out. Then I talked with self-advocates, staff, and agencies. Some people do Witness Slips, and some do not. I listened to what they had to say.

Doing a Witness Slip usually takes less than 5 minutes. Learning what a Witness Slip is and why it is important may take more time.

If you want to learn more about Witness Slips and how a bill becomes a law, check out pages 3 - 7.

If you want to go right to the Witness Slip Tip Sheet, go to pages 8 - 11.

Words to Know in This Resource

Bill: An idea for a new law or a change to a law already in place.

Dignity: You matter and should be treated nicely.

Elected Official: A person chosen by voters to do a job in the Illinois government. An elected official is also called a lawmaker.

Law: A rule made by the government.

Lawmaker: A person chosen by voters to do a job in the Illinois government. A lawmaker is also called an elected official.

Legislative Committee: A small group of lawmakers that talks about a bill before the whole legislature votes on it.

Legislature: A group of people in government whose main job is to make, change, and vote on laws. The legislature is the law-making branch of government.

Testimony: Telling lawmakers what you think or know about an issue.

Witness Slip: A form that lets lawmakers know what you think about a bill before they talk about it or vote on it.

Proponent: You like the bill and want it to become a law.

Opponent: You don't like the bill and don't want it to become a law.

How a Bill Becomes a Law in the United States

I'm Just a Bill is a fun cartoon with a song that was made in 1976. In the cartoon, a paper named Bill teaches a boy how a bill becomes a law. Bill starts with an idea. Then people work on the bill. It goes through many steps. At the end, the President signs it, and it becomes a law. The cartoon and song are a fun way to learn how a bill becomes a law in the United States.

You can watch the video here.

How A Bill Becomes a Law in Illinois

Every state has steps for how a bill becomes a law. Illinois has its own steps.

If you like pictures, here is a simple chart of the steps.

If you like to read, you can read about each step here.

NOTE: These resources were made by the Illinois Legislative Reference Bureau. They are not written in easy to understand language.

What is a Witness Slip?

A Witness Slip is a way to share your voice with lawmakers. You can tell them if you like a bill, do not like a bill, or just want to share information about it. Bills can make a difference for you, your family, and your community.

You do not need to be 18 years old to file a Witness Slip in Illinois. Kids and young people can also share their opinion about a bill. You also do not need to be a United States citizen to do a Witness Slip.

You can do a Witness Slip on a computer, tablet or smart phone.

A Witness Slip can be done for any bill that is going to be talked about in a legislative committee meeting.

After you do a Witness Slip, you cannot change it or delete it. Your Witness Slip stays on the public record. People can still find it many years later.

It is okay to say no to doing a Witness Slip if you do not understand the bill or do not want to do one.

Learn About Bills Before Doing a Witness Slip

- Ask your family and friends.
- Ask staff where you work or get services.
- Sign up for emails about new bills.
- Visit the Illinois General Assembly website.
- Connect with groups like The Arc of Illinois, the Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities, and Equip for Equality.

Witness Slips Are Important

Witness Slips are important. They help people tell lawmakers what they think. They help lawmakers listen to people. When you fill out a Witness Slip, you can share your voice before a law is made.

Here are three times that Witness Slips have made a difference in Illinois:

Dignity in Pay

The Dignity in Pay Act is a new law in Illinois. Governor JB Pritzker signed it on January 21, 2025.

This law helps people with disabilities get fair pay for their work. By the end of 2029, workers with disabilities will earn the same minimum wage as other workers.

The law also helps people with disabilities find and keep jobs.

Some people live in Community Integrated Living Arrangements or CILAs. They now get more money each month for their personal needs. The amount went up from $60 to $100 on January 1, 2025.

Many people filled out Witness Slips. They said yes because they wanted this bill to become a law. Their voices helped make a difference.

Supported Decision-Making or SDM

The Supported Decision-Making Agreement Act is a law in Illinois. Governor JB Pritzker signed it on August 27, 2021.

This law helps people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have more choices.

A person can choose people they trust to help them make choices about their health, money, and everyday life. The person makes the final decision.

Many people filled out Witness Slips. They said yes because they wanted this law to pass. Their voices helped make a difference.

Kiki's Law

Kiki's Law is a bill in Illinois. It is also called the Protective Medical Equipment Freedom Act.

This bill lets people wear masks and other protective medical equipment in public places. People do not have to tell others about their health. No one should be treated unfairly for wearing a mask or other protective medical equipment.

Kiki's Law is still going through the steps to become a law. You can track the steps here.

Many people filled out Witness Slips. They said yes because they want Kiki's Law to become a law in Illinois. Their voices can help make a difference.

Witness Slip Tip Sheet

Before you start, you will need to have

- Your full legal name
- Address where you live
- Your phone number
- Your email address

NOTE: If you do not have your own email address, you can get one for free. Some free email places are Gmail, Yahoo, Proton, and Mail.

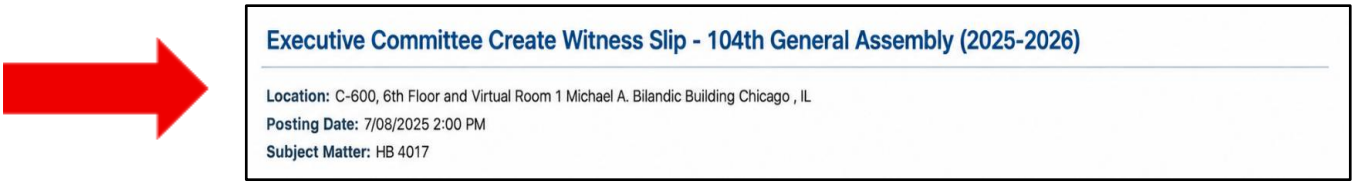
Make sure you know what the bill is about before you do a Witness Slip. If you do not understand, speak up and ask questions. You can learn more by:

- Asking a trusted friend or family member
- Asking a staff person you trust
- Looking up information on the computer

Steps to Do a Witness Slip

1. Click the link that was shared with you. The link will take you right to the Witness Slip for the bill.

2. Make sure the Date, Time, and Subject Matter or bill at the top of the page are correct before you do your Witness Slip. If it is not correct, ask someone for help.

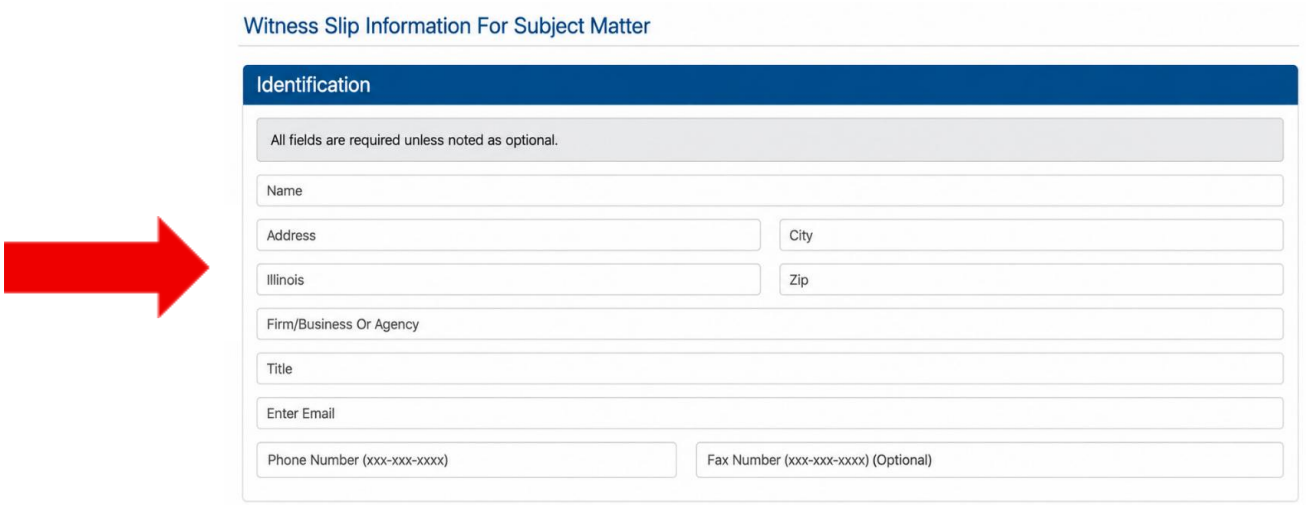


3. Type your information into the Identification area. This includes your full legal name and address including city and zip code.

   For Firm, Business or Agency, type in Self.

   For Title, type in Self-Advocate.

   Type in your email address and your phone number. Be sure to include the area code.



4. In the Representation area, type in Self.



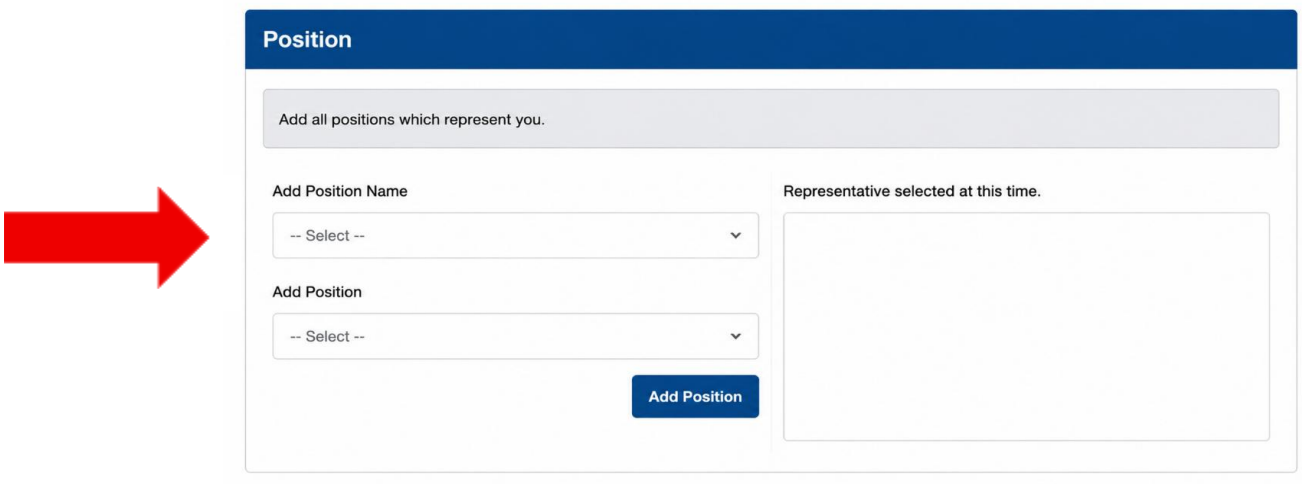
5. In the Position area, find the bill version under Add Position Name. Click the drop-down box or ▼ to see more bill versions. You may see more versions if the Committee Hearing is later in the process.

   NOTE: Make sure you have the right version of the bill for the Witness Slip you are doing.

   Use the drop-down box or ▼ to Add Position. You have three choices:
   - Proponent or you like the bill and want it to become a law.
   - Opponent or you don't like the bill and don't want it to become a law.
   - No Position on Merits or you are not saying yes or no to the bill. You just want to share information with the lawmakers.

   After you select your position, click Add Position. It will be added to the section titled Representative selected at this time.

   NOTE: Make sure you choose the right answer to show if you support, do not support, or have no position on the bill.



6. In the Testimony section, choose how you want to share your thoughts with the committee. You can pick the type of testimony you want to give at the committee meeting.

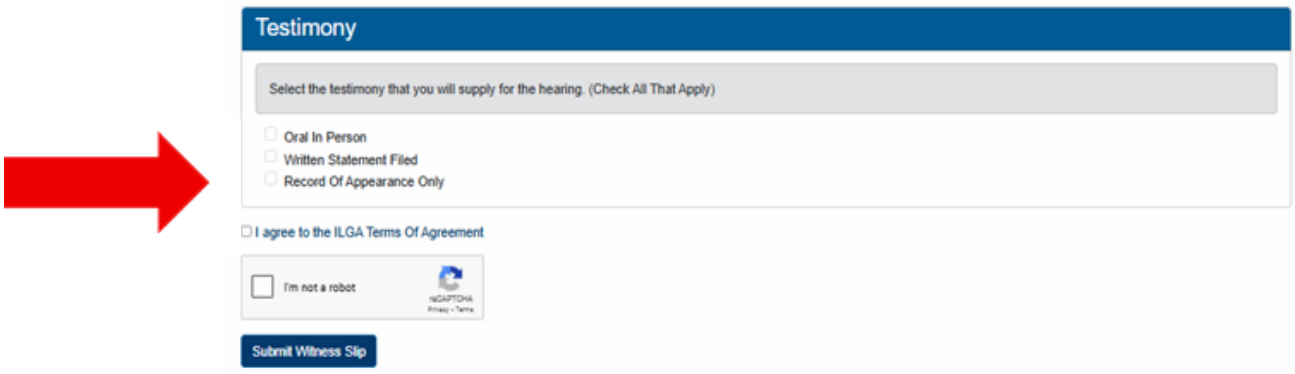
   Your choices are:
   - Oral in Person or you will go to the meeting and speak.
   - Written Statement Filed or you will write down what you want to say and send it to the committee.
   - Record of Appearance Only or your Witness Slip will show if you support the bill, do not support the bill, or have no opinion about the bill.

   NOTE: Most people choose Record of Appearance Only when they fill out a Witness Slip.

   Click the box next to I agree to the ILGA Terms of Agreement.

   I am not a robot is a safety check. Click the box to show that you are a real person, not a computer.

   Click Submit Witness Slip.



Congratulations! You spoke up and shared your voice by doing a Witness Slip!

You should also get an email saying your Witness Slip was sent.