

Chapter 15

Effective and Efficient Use of a Company-Representative Witness in Litigation

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Synopsis

§ 15.01.	Introduction.....	410
	[1] — Rules Governing Testimony of Company-Representative Witnesses	410
§ 15.02.	The Document Compelling Testimony and the Company’s Response.....	411
	[1] — Compliance with Procedural Requirements	412
	[2] — A Thoughtful and Reasoned Analysis of the Topic Areas	413
	[a] — Are the Topic Areas Sufficiently Specific?.....	413
	[b] — Are the Topic Areas Relevant to the Underlying Litigation?	415
	[c] — Does the Notice Impose Undue Burden on the Responding Company?.....	416
	[3] — Resolving Disputes Over Arguably Objectionable Deposition Notices.....	416
	[a] — Written Correspondence Stating Positions and/or Seeking Changes or Clarification	416
	[b] — Written Objections	418
	[c] — Motions to Compel or for a Protective Order	418
	[d] — Potential Consequences of Failing to Object Timely and Properly to Deposition Notices.....	419
§ 15.03.	Identifying and Preparing the Company-Representative Witness	420
	[1] — Identifying the Company-Representative Witness	421
	[2] — Preparing the Representative(s) for Effective Testimony	422
	[3] — Application of Privileges to Company Representative’s Preparation and Testimony	427

§ 15.04. **Taking and Defending a Company-Representative Witness’s Deposition**428
 [1] — Questions Within and Beyond the Scope of the
 Noticed Topics 428
 [2] — Use of Deposition Testimony at Trial 430
 § 15.05. **Conclusion**..... 431

§ 15.01. Introduction.

Most witnesses who testify in litigation do so as individuals, either as fact witnesses (testifying to factual matters within their personal knowledge) or as expert witnesses (testifying to opinions on matters within their areas of expertise). A witness can also testify as a representative of a public or private entity, such as a corporation, partnership, limited liability company, association, etc.

When a party to litigation wishes to obtain testimony of an entity — whether or not the entity is a party to the litigation — there are mechanisms by which the party can compel the entity to select and present a person to testify on delineated topics concerning the knowledge within the entity as a whole. For the entity responding to a request for testimony on its behalf, the selection and preparation of its company-representative witness is a process which requires special attention and a full understanding of the rights and responsibilities of the entity, representative, and attorneys preparing and presenting such a witness.

What follows is a discussion of issues that frequently arise in regards to company-representative testimony, and how these issues have been analyzed by various courts. In general, courts expect parties and their counsel to cooperate in discovery, and that expectation applies to company-representative depositions — which, like many aspects of litigation, are governed by standards of “reasonableness.”

[1] — Rules Governing Testimony of Company-Representative Witnesses.

Federal or state rules of civil procedure govern the taking of a company representative’s testimony, as well as the company’s obligations in responding to requests to depose a representative. The rule that applies in federal-court proceedings, Rule 30(b)(6) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, provides as follows: