Telling Your Story to a Policymaker

Your personal experiences and observations are yours alone and you are the expert. Telling your experiences to policymakers helps paint a picture of the realities of your world and educates them about the issues you care about. Whether you are a person with lived experience, a family member, or a service provider working with people with disabilities, you can frame your story to "show" policymakers the realities of your world. Keep it short and sweet—only a few paragraphs that can be told in 2-3 minutes. Practice in advance and time yourself. It is okay to read your testimony. **Use the guidelines below to write your story and ask**.

✓	**Introduce Yourself** – Name, where you live, who you represent, something about yourself, and your topic. (2-4 sentences)
	• **Give your name and city, village, or town**. This lets the policymaker know if you are a "constituent" and live in their district.
	• **Tell who you represent and something about yourself.** Are you representing yourself or an organization? You need permission to represent an organization. Give one sentence about yourself, for example, "I'm a person with an intellectual disability," or "I have a family member with dementia," or "I'm a mental health service provider."
	• **Give one sentence about what you're there to talk about.** For example, "I'm here to talk about community support services" or "I'm here to talk about assisted living for seniors," or "I'm here to talk about behavioral health treatment."
✓	**Tell Your Story** – Include your experiences or observations, include challenges, successes, and what has worked to solve the problem. (10-15 sentences)
	• **Explain some of the challenges you have faced**. Keep this VERY short. Don't give your full life's story (not enough time!). Point out the main challenge or barrier.
	• **Use personal examples**. "Show" policymaker what your life is like. Give a couple of actual experiences to "paint a picture" of yours or client challenges. This helps the policymaker connect with you personally and "see" what you've experienced. Be mindful about how much you are comfortable sharing publicly.
	• **Describe what has been successful and what works.** This is very important for helping the policymaker see that success is possible. What services have helped you or the people you serve? What solutions would you recommend to the policymaker? You want him or her to know what works so they know what to support.
✓	**Make your 'Ask'** – What you want the policymaker to do or to support. (2-4 sentences)
	• **Tell what action you want the policymaker to do.** For example, "Please support community services" or "Please support Senate Bill 122." State workers and some non-profit employees are restricted from making asks for specific legislation on their work time. If you are representing an organization, be sure to ask your supervisor about what you can and cannot ask for. People representing themselves can ask for whatever they want, on their own time.
	• **Address the public good.** Consider telling how the action or "ask" will benefit other people, families, the community, or the state. For example, "Senate Bill 122 will make it easier for people with disabilities to access safe, supportive housing."
✓	**Say "Thank you!"** – Thank him/her for taking the time to hear your story. (1 sentence)

Story Practice Sheet

- *Use the space below to write your story, or type it in a separate document.*
- *Is your story short and to the point? Can it be said in 2-3 minutes?*
- *Does it paint a picture with real examples and experiences?*
- *Does your story talk about the successes you've had and what has worked for you?*
- *Did you wrap it up with a clear "ask," and say "thank you?"*

Introduce yourself – Name, where you live, who you represent, topic. (2-4 sentences)

Tell Your Story – Your experiences, include challenges and successes. (10-15 sentences)

Ask – What you want the policymaker to do or support. (2-4 sentences)

Thank you – Thank him/her for taking the time to hear your story. (1 sentence)