

# 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, then write your story and ask on page 2. Samples are on page 3-4.**

✓	<p><b>Introduce Yourself</b> – Name, where you live, who you represent, something about yourself, and your topic. (2-4 sentences)</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Give your name and city, village, or town.</b> This lets the policymaker know if you are a “constituent” and live in their district.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Tell who you represent and something about yourself.</b> 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.”</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Give one sentence about what you’re there to talk about.</b> 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.”</li> </ul>
✓	<p><b>Tell Your Story</b> – Include your experiences or observations, include challenges, successes, and what has worked to solve the problem. (10-15 sentences)</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Explain some of the challenges you have faced.</b> Keep this VERY short. Don’t give your full life’s story (not enough time!). Point out the main challenge or barrier.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Use personal examples.</b> “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.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Describe what has been successful and what works.</b> 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.</li> </ul>
✓	<p><b>Make your ‘Ask’</b> – What you want the policymaker to do or to support. (2-4 sentences)</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Tell what action you want the policymaker to do.</b> 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.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Address the public good.</b> 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.”</li> </ul>
✓	<p><b>Say “Thank you!”</b> – Thank him/her for taking the time to hear your story. (1 sentence)</p>

# 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)

# Sample Story #1

## Introduce Yourself

My name is Allie Taylor and I live in Sitka, Alaska. I was born with cerebral palsy which affects my ability to move my body. I am also a senior citizen and am representing myself. I would like to talk about community support services for people with disabilities.

## Tell your Story

I have used a wheelchair since I was a young child. Growing up, I depended on my parents to help me eat, change clothes, go to the bathroom, and basically get around. When my mother died and my father became too old to care for me, I was moved into a care facility with round the clock care out of state.

Unfortunately, the facility was understaffed and couldn't always provide a lot of support, so I sat around a lot, watched TV, and didn't do much else. My speech is slurred so people often think I'm stupid. The thing is, I have a physical impairment, but not a cognitive impairment, my IQ is above 120, and so I'm way more capable than people think.

When my sister came down to visit me and saw the conditions, she went back to Alaska and researched how to bring me home. She learned that through the state's Medicaid Home and Community-Based Waiver program it was cheaper for me to live in my own apartment with a personal care attendant, than it was to live in a round-the-clock care facility.

Today I receive community support services—like supportive housing, transportation, day habilitation, and personal care assistance—all which help me live a meaningful life in my community. I have a part-time job and I'm enrolled at the University finally getting my bachelor's degree!

## Make Your 'Ask' and say 'Thank You'

I hope that you will support community-based services for people with disabilities, so we can live at home in our communities close to family and friends, and out of expensive institutional care. Thank you for taking time to hear my story.

## Sample Story #2

### Introduce Yourself

My name is Justin Bello. I live in Anchorage and am the director of services for the Anchorage Street Clinic. I am here representing the clinic and plan to talk about Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery Grants.

### Tell your Story

The Anchorage Street Clinic provides counseling and support for people with substance use disorders. The majority of our clients are homeless with a primary diagnosis of chronic alcoholism, and do not have the resources to pay for our services.

Our case manager is able to help clients access housing and employment services, residential treatment, and transitional services after incarceration, which are key for seeing people get back on their feet and off the streets. There are lots of successes once people get a place to live, get a job, and start on the road to their recovery. However, the need is still great and so she is very busy.

Our clinic is able to bill Medicaid for most of the services, but not all, so we depend on the state's Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery Grants to supplement this gap. These grants help keep our doors open and our staff paid.

Without the behavioral health grants, we would not be able to help Anchorage's most vulnerable citizens and would see more people continue to cycle in and out of expensive hospital emergency rooms, residential treatment, and/or prison—most of which the state will pay for anyway.

### Make Your 'Ask' and say 'Thank You'

Please support funding for Behavioral Health Treatment and Recovery Grants in the state's budget so that the Anchorage Clinic, and other clinics like us, can continue serve Alaska's most vulnerable citizens and keep Anchorage's streets healthier and safer. Thank you for your support.

## Story Practice Sheet (extra page)