

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 intro, story, and ask.](#) A practice sheet follows.

✓	Introduce Yourself – Name, where you live, who you represent, something about yourself, and your topic. (2-4 sentences)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give your name and city, village, or town. They need to know this “for the record.” Also lets policymakers know if you are a “constituent” and live in their district.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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)

Sample #1: Allie's Story

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 would like to talk about community support services for people with disabilities. I am here representing myself.

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 out of state with round the clock care.

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 not as smart as I am. The thing is, I have a physical impairment, not a cognitive impairment. My IQ is above 120 and 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 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 facility.

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

Make Your 'Ask'

I hope 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.

Say Thank you

Thank you for taking the time to hear my story.

Sample #2: Justin's Story

Introduce Yourself

My name is Justin Bello. I live in Anchorage and I am the director of services for the Anchorage Street Clinic. I am here representing the clinic and plan to talk about community supports and services for people with mental illness and substance use disorders.

Tell Your Story

The Anchorage Street Clinic provides services for youth and adults with mental illness, substance use, and other behavioral health disorders who do not have the resources to pay. Our services include crisis stabilization, triage, system navigation, counseling, treatment, and recovery services.

Our case manager works with clients who are often homeless and in active addiction. We help them get access to treatment, housing and employment, and reentry services for people who are returning to their community after incarceration. We also work with youth who are leaving foster care and juvenile justice to help them be stable, successful adults.

Without our services, many of our clients will be on the street and in crisis, using expensive emergency services, hospital care, law enforcement, and corrections.

Access to community support services is key for a person's stability. Success is more likely when people have a safe place to live and access to treatment and recovery support. The need is huge and we struggle to keep up, but we work hard and are helping many people get better.

Make Your 'Ask'

Please support community support services for people with mental illness, addiction disorders, and other behavioral health disorders, so that the Anchorage Street Clinic, and clinics like ours, can continue to serve Alaska's most vulnerable citizens and keep Anchorage's streets healthier and safer.

Say Thank you

Thank you for your taking the time to meet with me today.

Story Practice Sheet

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

Tell Your Story – Your experience, challenges, successes, and real examples. (15-20 sentences)

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

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