

# Telling Your Story to a Policymaker

Your personal story is yours alone. You are the expert. Telling your story to policymakers helps paint a picture of the realities of your world, while educating them about the issues you care about. Be confident that no one else is the expert of what you care about. Be truthful, be yourself, but also remember your limits and how much you want to share publically. Keep it short and sweet—only a few paragraphs that can be told in 3-5 minutes. [Read through this packet and write down your own story on the last page.](#) Here are some guidelines:

✓	<b>Introduce yourself</b> – your name and residence, subject, and purpose. (2-4 sentences)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Include your full name and city</b> or town. This gives people a frame of reference and also lets them know if you live in their district (constituent).</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Introduce yourself, the “main character”</b> Paint a brief picture of who you are, what you do for a living, if you’re a student, someone who has a disability, is a family member of someone with a disability, or a provider of services.</li> </ul>
✓	<b>Tell Your Story</b> – the experience or challenge, the action, the result. (5-15 sentences)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Explain some of the challenges</b> you have faced. Keep this VERY short. Do not give your life’s story (not enough time!). The goal is to focus on one disability and the main challenge you are having.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Paint a vivid picture.</b> Use descriptive language that helps listeners connect with you emotionally. DO NOT use anger or harsh language, bitterness or extreme emotions. This usually makes people not listen.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Add personal examples</b> that will help “show” policymakers what your life is like. It helps the listener get a picture of what you’re talking about.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Describe what has been successful.</b> What services have helped you stay stable? What supports would you recommend to the policymaker? This is a very important piece of telling your story. You want the policymaker to know what works to make life better for you and people like you.</li> </ul>
✓	<b>Wrap it up</b> – state your “ask” and say thank you. (3-5 sentences)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Make your “ask.”</b> State what you’re asking the policymaker to do. Describe what action or position you want him/her to take. This should be specific and refer to a bill, a budget item, city ordinance, or other act.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Address the public good.</b> If you like, add how the action or “ask” will benefit other individuals, families, community, or state.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Say Thank You!</b></li> </ul>

# Sample Personal Story

Introduce yourself

My name is Rachel Williams, I'm 19 years old, and I live in Sitka, Alaska. I was in residential treatment out of state for one year. I have also gone through substance abuse treatment and have been diagnosed with ARND, a fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Tell your story

From the time I was little, I always got into trouble. When I was in elementary school I got in trouble for talking too much and talking without raising my hand. In middle school, I had problems understanding the assignments and I was bored, so I didn't do much work. In high school, most of the teachers said I was too hyper and talked too much. My parents got mad at me too and agreed with the teachers a lot, so I stopped trusting them and stopped trusting teachers, and started trusting my friends more. My friends were drinking a lot and so I did it too and I found it helped me feel better about myself. Eventually, I just stopped going to school because it was boring and no one really cared anyway.

I started couch-surfing at friends houses and moved into an apartment with some friends who were not a good influence, because of drugs and drinking and partying. When I was staying there I got arrested and had to go to treatment as part of my sentence.

I got sent away to residential treatment in Texas where I learned a lot of new tricks, like how to cheat systems, how to fake a pee test, how to break into a house to get money, and more. When I came back to Alaska, my case worker made me go to a therapist and that has helped me see why things are the way they are and how I can be in control better. She's nice to me and acts like she cares and she helps me see that maybe I am an okay person and that I have a lot of skills too, like I'm a good writer and a good artist, a good people person, and I can multi-task pretty well. Unfortunately, my parents don't know how to deal with the "new" me, and my school doesn't seem ready either, so it's been kind of hard to stay focused on what I need to do to stay healthy. But I'm trying!

Wrap it up

I hope that you will support funding community programs that give young people things like counseling and treatment and job support, so we can stay at home, near to our families, and out of trouble. Thank you for taking the time to hear my story.

# Story Practice Sheet

- *Is your story short and to the point? Is it only one page and 3-5 minutes?*
- *Is it honest? 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?*
- *Do you wrap it up with a clear "ask," and do you say "thank you?"*

**Introduce yourself** – your name, residence, disability, organization affiliation, etc. (2-4 sentences)

**Tell Your Story** – your experience, challenges, what has worked for you. (5-15 sentences)

**Wrap it up** – what you want the policymaker to do—the "ask". Say thank you. (3-5 sentences)

