

Sharing your story for a political purpose

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Why should I share my story?

Elected officials - People voted to work in the government.

Policies- Rules or laws elected officials make to solve problems.

How are policies made? **By sharing stories with elected officials!**



Who makes the laws?

Congress makes the laws in the Federal government (for the whole United States).

Congress has 2 parts:

- **Senators** (2 for each state)
- **Representatives** (based on how many people live in a state)



Important parts of a story



1. What policy are you looking at?
2. How does that policy relate to your life?
3. What is the goal of sharing your story?

Story Structure



1. Name and address.
2. The problem.
3. Why that problem is important to you.
4. How that problem affects your life.
5. How this problem affects other people.
6. Ways the problem can be fixed.
7. End with an ask (a question or request).

How do I make people remember my story?

Is/Does your story:

Short and Direct?

Personal to you?

Have enough details?

Show a problem is big?



Where can I share my story?

Phone calls

In-person meetings

Emails or letters

Op-eds

Town Hall meetings

Legislative Testimony

Public Comment periods

Social Media



Where can I find chances to share my story?

- Websites of elected officials
- Websites of nonprofit organizations
- Social media pages
- Newspapers (in print or online)
- Your state's Developmental Disabilities Council, Protection and Advocacy center, or other disability rights organizations



Phone calls

A lot of calls = a bigger impact!

Remember that elected officials may have more than one office.

Prepare a script before you call so you know what to say



What if I can't talk on the phone?

You can use a text-to-speech device and play your message over the phone

You can ask someone to talk for you

You can call after the office is closed and leave a message



Meeting in-person

Face-to-face meetings help elected officials understand there are real people affected by a problem.

Try to make your appointment to meet at least 2 weeks before you want to meet.



How should I prepare for an in-person meeting?

Ask how long the meeting will be.

Decide what clothes you want to wear.

Research the problem you want to talk about.

Print out any handouts or pictures.

Try to arrive for the meeting at least 10 minutes early.



What should I do during a meeting?

Be ready to answer questions.

Don't raise your voice or argue, even if you disagree about a problem.

After a meeting, always send a thank-you email.



Emails and Letters

Same as phone calls - more letters,
bigger impact.

Letters work better than emails.

You can also try faxing a message.



Op-eds

An **op-ed** or is a story written for a newspaper, magazine, or website.

People write op-eds about a topic that has already been in the news.



Town Hall Meetings

Town hall meetings are held by members of government to hear from everyday people.

2 types of town hall meetings:

- General (to talk about any problem or policy)
- Specific (to talk about one problem or policy)



Legislative Testimony

Groups of **legislators** (the people who make laws) have meetings called **hearings** to learn more about a bill before they vote on it to become law.

This is a chance for you to give **legislative testimony**, or tell legislators about how a law would affect you.



What should be in my testimony?

1. Your name and where you are from.
2. The name and number of the law.
3. What you think about the law.
4. Sum up your main points in one sentence at the end.
5. Thank the legislators for listening to you.



How should I prepare for a hearing?

Print out copies of your testimony to give to legislators.

Arrive early to the hearing to sign up to testify.



During the hearing

You will testify in front of a group.

After your testimony, legislators may ask you questions.

Even if you sign up for a spot to give testimony, time may run out before you can.



Public comment periods

After a law is passed, the government needs to figure out how the law will be put into action.

These decisions are called **regulations**.

People give their opinions on regulations during a **public comment period**.



More about public comments

Public comments are submitted online.

Sometimes regulations are written in language that is difficult to understand.



Making things routine

Choose a day each week that you will look for chances to share your story.

Work with your friends to make sure each of you stays involved.

Try getting involved in a local organizing group!



Tips for group work

Be consistent!

Divide up tasks.

Work together to make sure
everyone's voices are heard!



Keeping the momentum going

Always send a follow-up letter!

Let other people know when you share your story.

Remember that there are so many different ways to share a story!



Self-care

Add time to rest or do relaxing activities into your routine.

Find a few people who are good listeners and ask to talk to them about how you feel.



Resources

Civic Engagement Toolbox for Self-Advocates

<https://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/toolkits/civic/>

PADSA Resource Guides

<https://pacific-alliance.org/resource-guides/>

Thanks for listening! Any questions?

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The Autistic Self Advocacy Network

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