



Guide to Advocacy through Storytelling July 2025

Advocacy is all about storytelling. Sharing your story can educate, inform, persuade, and motivate people to make positive change. Whether you are advocating to policymakers, a medical provider, or your school system, your story can make a difference.

Stories can simplify complicated ideas or policies and make them relatable and understandable. By sharing your story, you are making an authentic and personal connection with your audience, which can move them to act. For example, Medicaid is a complex system that can be hard to understand. But a person's story of how Medicaid-funded speech therapy improved their life is simple to comprehend. It illustrates the importance of Medicaid better than any piece of data.

The Arc of Massachusetts prioritizes storytelling in all our work, particularly in legislative advocacy. **We hope that this guide helps you craft your own story as a form of effective advocacy.**

1. Start by introducing yourself.

- What is your name? What other information is important to share? (Example: share if you are a constituent, your address or city/town, etc.)
- What is your connection to the disability community? (Example: self, family member, professional connection, etc.)
- Is there any other information to share that is relevant to your story?

2. Tell your audience why you are sharing your story and what you are going to discuss.

- Are you focusing on a specific piece of legislation or a particular program? If so, name it and share any details that are important. (Example: bill number, name of program, etc.)
- Describe your connection to this issue (Example: do you attend the program? How would you benefit from the bill passing? Why are you passionate about this topic?)

3. Share your story

- You do not have to share every detail. Focus on 1-2 details or moments that show your experience and reinforce the change you seek. Selecting a few key and memorable details can help the listener connect and really “get it.”
- Consider your goal when deciding what details to include.
 - Do you want your audience to pass a bill? If so, tell a story that shows the need for the bill and how the bill would positively impact your life.
 - Do you want your audience to increase funding for a program? If so, explain how the current lack of funding has impacted you personally as a participant or staff.
- Try to “show” rather than “tell.” For example, instead of saying, “All bathrooms need universal changing tables,” tell a story about a time you were out and having a great time, but your family member needed to be changed and there wasn’t a universal changing table. Focus on the impact it had on you and your loved one.

4. What is your “ask”?

- Tell them what you want them to do. Be clear and direct.
- For legislation, you may be asking them to support a bill, co-sponsor a bill, move a bill out of committee, or talk to their colleagues about how important the bill is.

5. Thanks and Next Steps

- Thank them for listening and for taking the time to connect.
- Reiterate your ask. Remind them what you want them to do.
- Stay connected, share your contact information, and follow-up.

Tips & Tricks

- If you are sharing someone else's story on their behalf, make sure you have their consent! Confirm that they are comfortable with what you are sharing and how you are sharing it.
- You do not need to be a policy expert to tell your story. Focus on the "why."
- Be creative! Share a photo, send a thank you card, or mention a personal connection you have to the legislator. Help them remember you and your story.
- Try not to assume opposition. Be polite and respectful. Share your story in an educational and clear way.
- Use existing resources for help!
 - [The Arc's 2025-2026 legislative platform and fact sheets](#)
 - [The Arc's fact sheets on state & federal policy issues](#)
 - [The Arc of Massachusetts action alert center](#) (to advocate on state issues)
 - [The Arc of the United States' action alert center](#) (to advocate on federal issues)
 - Reach out! We are here to help. Please contact Nora Bent, Director of Government Affairs and Strategic Partnerships (nbent@arcmass.org) for guidance, support, or with questions.

Example & Template

Example

Chris is calling his State Representative to talk about a bill he cares about.

My name is Chris and I am your constituent. I live in Worcester. I have autism and I work at the local hospital. I want to tell you about a bill that is important to me. The bill would help train doctors and nurses in how to work best with people with autism. The bill numbers are H242/S149.

I work with a lot of really great doctors and nurses at the hospital. I also go to the doctor a lot because I have some health issues. I like it when the doctor talks to me directly and listens to my concerns or questions. It doesn't make me feel heard when they ignore my concerns. I have a great doctor who knows how to work with me, and understands that sometimes when I get nervous, I get quiet and need a minute before I can talk. Everyone deserves to have a doctor like this, and this bill would make sure that nurses and doctors get that education to be the best they can be.

Thank you for listening to me. Please cosponsor this bill so that people like me can have good experiences at the doctor. If you have any questions, you can call me at ____ or email me at ____.

Template

Name:

Address:

Email Address:

Phone Number:

[share photo of your loved one, family, etc]

[Share your story in 1-2 paragraphs. What are the top 1-2 issues that matter most to you? How does your story inform your passion for these issues? What do you want the Representative/Senator to know and remember to help spur action?]