Public Advocacy

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Trust

Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority

Trust Beneficiaries are people with:

- *Mental Illness*
- *Substance Use Disorders*
- *Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities*
- *Alzheimer's disease/Dementia*
- *Traumatic Brain Injuries*

Partner Advisory Boards:

ABADA Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse

AMHB Alaska Mental Health Board

Alaskan Seniors Living Longer Growing Stronger from the Alaska Commission on Aging

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES & SPECIAL EDUCATION

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy is the act of influencing people's lives.

It can be ***personal advocacy***, such as helping someone fill out an application or navigate a complicated system.

It can be ***public advocacy***, such as speaking out at a public meeting, sending an email, meeting with a policymaker, or inviting others to join with you to advocate for something you want.

Advocacy vs. Lobbying

Advocacy *is speaking out and for support about an issue. For example, "Please support community-based services for people with disabilities."*

Lobbying *is a direct communication with a policymaker or staff that attempts to influence a specific policy, funding proposal, or piece of legislation. For example, "Please support SB 102."*

- *Citizens may advocate, educate, and give their opinions to policymakers, but must say they are representing themselves, and do it on their own time.*
- *People who work for non-profit organizations may advocate and lobby, but there are legal limits that need to be understood to remain in compliance.*
- *More than 10-hours in a month of direct contact with policymakers or staff requires registering as a lobbyist—for both citizens and professionals.*
- *State workers may NEVER advocate or lobby during state work hours or on state equipment.*

THE PUBLIC PROCESS

Our system is built on the rights of citizens to engage in decision-making on topics that affect their lives. We do this through communicating with policymakers:

- ✓ ***Send emails and letters***
- ✓ ***Meet with a policymaker***
- ✓ ***Testify at public meetings***
- ✓ ***Attend public events***

Who are the POLICYMAKERS?

- *State Legislators (Senators and Representatives)*
- *Borough Assembly Members*
- *City Council Members*
- *Village Council Members*
- *Native Corporation Board Members*
- *School Board Members*

CITIZENS *have the right to communicate their opinion and make recommendations for what believe or want.*

POLICYMAKERS are elected to serve CITIZENS.

It is the role of **POLICYMAKERS** to work for the citizens of their community, and it is the role of **CITIZENS** to communicate what they need!

Telling Your Story to Policymakers

The Value of Your Personal Story

- *Policymakers hear lots of opinions from lobbyists, business owners, and agency professionals.*

Senator John Coghill meets with constituents in his Fairbanks legislative office.

- *Personal stories get their attention because they are unique and represent real people's lives.*
- *Personal stories help paint a picture of issues and experiences the policymaker may not know about.*

- *Policymakers want to know the perspectives and opinions of their constituents.*
- *People who live in a policymaker's district have the power to vote, and it is in the policymaker's best interest to listen to their constituents.*

Personal stories can be…

… Your own story as a person with lived experience.

… Your experience as a family member or caregiver of a person with lived experience.

… The experience of a person you know or work with (with their permission).

… A composite of people you know or work with.

… A hypothetical story based on real experiences.

Sharing Your Story

1. Introduce yourself, where you live, who you are representing, your topic.

2. Tell your personal story, with challenges and successes, and use personal examples.

3. Make your "ask." Give the policymaker an idea of what they can do to fix the problem.

Keep it between 2-3 minutes!

Telling Your Story in 3-minutes or less

Prepare in advance. Write your story on the "Story Practice Sheet" or separate document. Follow the guidelines.

Presenting it to a policymaker. Once written, you can put it into an email, letter, or read it aloud for in meetings with policy-makers or public testimony.

Plan on being nervous. Reading it aloud helps you stay on track and free from distractions.

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)

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Have Confidence

- Your personal story is yours alone. You are the expert of your experiences and observations. No one can argue with that. Have confidence in that.
- However, be aware of your limits and how much you are comfortable sharing publicly. Public meetings are recorded and your comments will be in a permanent record.

Speaking at a Public Meeting

- *Sign up ahead of time, there is usually a list. Wait until your name is called. If you call on the phone, give your name to the moderator and wait your turn.*

- *Know how much time you have to speak. Usually 2-3 minutes. Stick to the time limit. If you go over, it can irritate committee members and turn them against your cause.*

- *Introduce yourself, tell your story, make your ask. Keep it short and sweet.*

- *Understand the Chair is the "gatekeeper" of the meeting. All actions go through him or her. Remember to 'speak through the chair.'*

- *Present your opinion in a respectful manner. Don't raise your voice, accuse, yell, or blame. If you do, you can turn people against your cause.*
- *If you are respectful, it is more likely you will be treated with respect.*

Look through the "***How to Follow the State Legislature Online***" document for how to track legislation, learn about legislators, watch live meetings or recordings of past meetings, read minutes, or set up your own bill tracking system.

How to Follow the State Legislature Online

To follow what happens at the Alaska State Legislature, go to: www.akleg.gov. From this page, you can track bills, learn about the legislative process, follow committee action, read meeting minutes, learn about legislators, watch live meetings or recordings of past meetings, and set up your own bill tracking system.

- Click on BILLS & LAWS to track bills by action, sponsor, subject, and more.
- To read about a specific bill, type in the bill number in SEARCH box (for example, SB56). On that page you can read the bill's committee history, sponsor statement, back-up documents, and copies of the bill. To read a copy of the bill, click on FULL TEXT and when you get to that page, click on the red & white PDF icon. Remember when reading a bill that the text that is [CAPITALIZED AND BRACKETED] is being deleted, and the **underlined text** is what is being added. Sometimes a "new section" is added, and will NOT be underlined. Look for the words "a new section to read" followed by regular text. This is new text to be added to law.
- To learn about a specific legislator's bills, go to SPONSOR SUMMARY under BILLS & LAWS.
- To search bills by subject, go to SUBJECT SUMMARY, under BILLS & LAWS.
- To learn how bills are progressing through committees, go to BILLS IN COMMITTEE under BILLS & LAWS.
- To read about or listen to what happened in a committee hearing, go to MINUTES AND AUDIO under COMMITTEES.
- To learn when committees meet so you can follow along or know when to call-in for public testimony, go to HEARING SCHEDULES under COMMITTEES.
- To create your own free bill-tracking account, go BILLS & LAWS and under Tools, click on BILL TRACKING MANAGEMENT FACILITY (BTMF). Follow instructions to create an account that will track the bills you want and send you an email alert when a bill on your list has action.
- For tutorials, legislator contact lists, information, etc., go to PUBLICATIONS.

- To learn who your own legislators are, go to: www.akleg.gov and scroll down to the box "WHO REPRESENTS ME" and input your address and zip code. Every Alaskan has one Senator and one House Representative based on your home address.
- To learn about state legislators, see Senators at http://akleg.gov/senate.php, and see Representatives at http://akleg.gov/house.php.
- For questions about the State Legislature, contact the Legislative Information Office in Juneau at 907-465-4648.

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Look through the "***Advocacy from Home"*** document for ideas on how you can get involved with the legislative process and get your voice to policymakers.

Advocacy from Home

When an interested person commits to perform one act of advocacy, the momentum grows, the effect gets larger, and policymakers pay more attention.

Following is a list of things you can do to make a change. Choose one (or more), make a commitment, and follow-through!

- ☐ Write a letter/email to a public official about a situation that matters to you.
- ☐ Call in or appear in person and give your personal testimony at a public meeting.
- ☐ Coordinate a letter/email campaign. Invite five people to write a letter/email to a public official.
- ☐ Make a telephone call to a public official's office (city council, representative, senator).
- ☐ Coordinate a telephone-calling campaign. Invite five people to call a public official.
- ☐ Write a letter-to-the-editor about a situation that matters to you.
- ☐ Coordinate a letter-to-the-editor campaign. Invite five people to write letters to the editor.
- ☐ Use Facebook and other social media to post an opinion on matters related to vulnerable Alaskans.
- ☐ Go to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority's JOINT ADVOCACY webpage and learn about action you can take, or organize five people to do it, at: www.alaskamentalhealthtrust.org/jointadvocacy.
- ☐ Host a reception for a public official in your home or place of work. Show them firsthand what your situation is. A fundraiser is even better.
- ☐ Ask five people to host a reception for a public official in their homes or places of work.
- ☐ Tag onto a public event, party or reception, set up a table that raises awareness about an issue.
- ☐ Visit your own legislator in your hometown and ask others to do it. Go to http://akleg.gov/lios.php to learn who your personal legislators are (scroll to the bottom and input address under WHO REPRESENTS ME).
- ☐ Make five personal contacts to friends to spread the word about an issue.
- ☐ Post on Facebook a link to a news story or letter to the editor on a topic you care about, or talk with your friends and co-workers about the issue.
- ☐ Write a longer opinion piece for your local newspaper, or find someone else to do it.
- ☐ Go on the radio talk show and discuss an issue, or find someone else to do it.
- ☐ Write a personal story and send it to a policymaker.
- ☐ Gather five written personal stories and send them to policymakers.
- ☐ Coordinate a local media campaign (with newspaper, radio, and/or TV).
- ☐ Attend a 'Super Advocate' advocacy training sponsored by the Trust and partner advisory boards.
- ☐ Testify at a public meeting (State Legislature, Assembly, City or Village Council, School Board).
- ☐ Gather letters of support (on letterhead) from organizations that support an issue. Give the stack (hard copies) to a public official.
- ☐ Coordinate a local advocacy effort in your community. Contact the media, host receptions, organize letter-writing and telephone, coordinate volunteers in your area, visit legislators, etc.).

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Join Our Advocacy Network

Includes:

- *Advocacy Alerts (opportunities to act)*
- *Talking points and education about issues*
- *Legislative bill tracking spreadsheet*
- *Weekly teleconferences during Legislative session*

GO TO THE TRUST'S WEBSITE:
www.alaskamentalhealthtrust.org/jointadvocacy

Trust
Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority

Thank You!

Contact Advocacy Coordinator, 907-465-4765, advocacy.coordinator@mhtrust.org

For more information, go to: www.alaskamentalhealthtrust.org/jointadvocacy