



IOWA
COALITION
AGAINST
DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

Advocacy Toolkit



www.icadv.org

The Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV) represents 22 local service provider agencies offering crime victim support services throughout Iowa. The Coalition is committed to advancing policies supporting a vital victim service provider workforce, statewide access to effective victim support services, and promoting comprehensive responses to violence and effective solutions for ending and preventing it.

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- State legislator & Governor contact information; legislative committee info
- Advocacy & lobbying information
- Contact information for Iowa’s U.S. Congressional delegation
- Terminology and Definitions

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit provides information to assist with state policy advocacy primarily focused on Iowa state legislators, but the resource pages include contact information for Iowa’s U.S. Congressional delegation. We use the terms ‘policymaker’ or ‘decision-maker’ as umbrella terms to refer to people who make decisions about public policy, which includes elected officials as well as staff, agency directors, etc., i.e., state legislators are a specific group of policymakers elected by voters.

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy refers to any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others (Bolder Advocacy). It uses multiple strategies for engagement to build relationships with policymakers, enlist strategic allies, and mobilize stakeholders.

Many individuals engage in advocacy outside of their working lives; however, for nonprofit agencies and many professionals, like crime victim service providers and social workers, advocacy is their full-time job, with expectations embedded in ethical and professional guidelines. Nonprofit agencies qualify for tax-exempt status by the IRS because their purpose and mission improve the quality of life for individuals, families, or communities at the local, state, or national level.

Advocacy encompasses various activities individuals and organizations can engage in to influence public policy. It involves educating policymakers; stakeholders (individuals, communities, organizations); voters, the public, media, etc., about unmet needs or the impact of policy decisions. For example, with state legislators, advocacy is about helping them understand how people and communities are affected by the decisions they make.


WHY IT IS IMPORTANT?

Advocacy helps ensure public policies are informed by the people and communities they impact. Elected officials, and other policymakers, make decisions affecting the quality of our lives and our communities, including how our tax dollars are spent, how systems and communities respond to violence, and how people meet basic needs.

State policy decisions are often driven by people who engage with state legislators. Engagement helps make an issue(s) part of public policy discussions.

You can make a huge difference with a very small effort.

A conversation or an email with a state legislator goes a long way, and maintaining a relationship can positively impact individuals and communities moving forward.

- Legislators care about and prioritize the issues people talk to them about. Without input from communities, organizations, or personal experience, the legislative process operates in a vacuum resulting in laws and policies that can be disconnected from actual needs.
 - State legislators rely on constituents and stakeholders to inform their decisions. They are more likely to act on an issue they know, especially when they learn about it from a constituent or someone they trust.
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ADVOCACY VS. LOBBYING (see Resource page to links for more info.)

Advocacy is any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause supports, defends, or pleads on behalf of others (*Bolder Advocacy*). There are no restrictions on advocacy that includes educating about issues, about your organization and the work you do, about unmet need, about funding needed to support your work or ongoing communication (calls, emails, meetings) to share information, analysis, and stories from the field to illustrate the impact of policy decisions.

Lobbying is a specific type of advocacy that involves communication directed toward a policymaker and intended to influence specific legislation. Advocacy is only lobbying with all three of these: communication with a policymaker or the public about specific legislation and requesting they take a specific position. Direct lobbying is communication with a policymaker requesting that they take a position on a specific bill. Grassroots lobbying is communicating with the public about a specific bill and urging them to contact policymakers, e.g., "Contact Senator Doe and urge her to Vote Yes on SF 5678."

Nonprofit organizations cannot use federal or state funds to pay for lobbying expenses; however, nonprofit organizations can lobby using other funding sources as long as lobbying is not a substantial part of their activities.*

EDUCATE VS. ADVOCACY VS. LOBBY

Educate = inform, statement of facts

Domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children. Escaping abuse generally means losing housing & economic security, as well as the means to regain it.

Advocate = Educate + Ask

DV leading cause homeless ... please enact policies reducing barriers to accessing safe housing.

Lobby = Policymaker + Specific bill + Ask to vote yes/no

Senator Doe, I urge you to vote yes on SF 5432.

*A brief explainer for informational purposes only. Federal law limits the amount of expenditures (money/time) non-profits can spend on lobbying. Non-profit lobbying rules are governed by the [Internal Revenue Service \(IRS\)](#) using either the 'insubstantial part test' or the '501h expenditures test.' The insubstantial part test is the default if a non-profit does not affirmatively elect the 501h expenditure and under these rules, tax practitioners estimate non-profits can devote 3-5% of their activities toward lobbying.

ABOUT THE IOWA LEGISLATURE

The Iowa State Legislature is officially known as the Iowa General Assembly. The session is approximately 100-110 days, but can run longer. For example, January 2025 marks the first year of the 91st Iowa General Assembly, which includes calendar years 2025 and 2026. The 2025 session convened on January 13, 2025, and is scheduled to adjourn on May 2, 2025.

Legislators: Iowa House and Iowa Senate

The Iowa General Assembly comprises two 'chambers': the Iowa House of Representatives and the Iowa Senate. One hundred Iowa Representatives are elected to 2-year terms, and 50 Iowa Senators are elected to 4-year terms.

Legislators are elected to represent people who live in their districts ('constituents') regardless of who voted for them. They are farmers, business owners, teachers, healthcare providers, military, lawyers, public safety officials, etc.

Each of us is represented by one State Representative and one State Senator.

Every Senate district includes two House districts. Senators represent about 61,000 people, and Representatives about 30,500 people. Every ten years after the U.S. Census, states go through a 'redistricting process' that changes the physical boundaries of legislative districts to ensure legislators represent about the same number of people after accounting for changes in population.

2025 Iowa Legislature

SENATE

- 34 Republicans
- 16 Democrats

HOUSE

- 66 Republicans
- 33 Democrats

ABOUT THE IOWA LEGISLATURE CONTINUED

HOW AN IDEA BECOMES A LAW

Laws start out as ideas, such as a problem to be solved, best practices to implement, and needed funding. Anyone can propose an idea for a bill, but only legislators, the Governor, or a state agency can sponsor or introduce a bill for consideration by legislators.

STEP 1

Introduction. After a bill is introduced in the House or Senate, it is assigned a bill number and referred to a committee, and a committee chair assigns the bill to a subcommittee.

STEP 2

Subcommittee Consideration. This is a key step in the process because a bill's chance of survival is often determined here. Also, subcommittee meetings are open to the public and are an opportunity for anyone to provide input. If a majority approves the bill, it advances to full committee.

STEP 3

Full Committee Consideration. House or Senate members can amend the bill, approve the bill without changes, or take no action.

STEP 4

Floor Debate and Vote. Bills approved by the full committee are put on the 'debate calendar' which is a running list of all bills eligible for consideration. The House Majority Leader and Senate President decide which bills will be considered. If a majority vote 'yes' to a bill it is sent to the other chamber where the process starts again. The other chamber may approve the bill, amend it, reject it, or not consider it at all.

STEP 5

Final Action. A bill must pass both chambers in identical form to become a law; once they do, bills are sent to the Governor. If the Governor approves the bill, they will sign it, and it becomes law on July 1 unless indicated otherwise. If the Governor opposes a bill, they can veto it, and the bill does not become law unless legislators override the veto, which requires a two-thirds majority vote.

KEY POINT

You have not failed if a bill you support does not advance. It takes years to enact a law, and progress should not be measured by the number of bills passed. Successful advocacy is more accurately measured by the impact of actions that raise awareness and educate policymakers about an issue.


ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

ENGAGING LEGISLATORS: WHO SHOULD I TALK TO?

- Legislators from where you live.
- Legislators from your community, where you work, attend school, or your service area.
- Legislators who serve on committees of jurisdiction for your issue or in a leadership position.
- Legislators who have personal interest or experience with the issue.

ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS: WHO CAN HELP ME EDUCATE LEGISLATORS?

Stakeholders include people and organizations you can engage to help gain support for an issue or defend against opposition. Think about other people, communities, or organizations you can engage to help you advance an issue or those you can engage to help you reach a legislator or elevate the issue.

- **Directly impacted stakeholders.** Engaging other organizations and people who are directly impacted is highly effective. For example, many housing issues impact landlords and tenants. Regardless of whether these groups agree on an issue, legislators want to know what each thinks before voting on a bill.
 - **Strategic allies.** These are people who can join you, validate the importance of your issue, or have a relationship with a legislator that can help. Think about specific professionals, individuals, organizations, and influential, respected, or well-known people in your community who have a relationship with your legislator or who are willing to speak publicly on behalf of your issue.
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ADVOCACY STRATEGIES CONTINUED

WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH LEGISLATORS



Email/send a letter or make a phone call. Legislators often tally outreach from constituents on any given issue and receiving even a few unique calls or emails gets their attention. Note: legislators prioritize responding to their constituents, so always include contact your information in any communications.



Sign up for legislator listservs or newsletters. Sign up and you can learn what issues are important to them and how they are talking about the legislative session.



Request a meeting or attend local events. During the legislative session, legislators are in Des Moines Monday through Thursday afternoon and can meet with constituents who come to the state Capitol. However, they are elected to serve all year round, and you can request a meeting when they are working in their district or talk to them at local events.



Educate and be an ongoing resource. Maintain your relationship by keeping in touch on a regular basis. Send information as an FYI even when it is not related to a bill, send them your newsletters and annual reports, or media articles highlighting your staff and your work in the community.



Attend Legislative Forums – Public Meetings with Legislators. During the legislative session, legislators and communities hold regular public meetings or ‘legislative forums’ in their districts. Attending legislative forums offers an effective way to meet legislators, raise issues, or just introduce yourself and educate others about what you do. **[Click here](#)** for a calendar of legislative forums but check back frequently for updates.



Public communication. Numerous types of public communication provide effective ways to raise awareness and influence public opinion which gets legislator attention. For example, target social media to legislators and ask allies to share your stuff or submit a post to local listservs, community newsletters, or local newspapers.

TIPS FOR MEETING AND TALKING WITH STATE LEGISLATORS

Trust your expertise

/experience. Please don't assume legislators know your issue. They live, work, and are part of the communities they represent. However, they must make decisions about a range of unfamiliar issues. Without full-time staff, they rely on the expertise of people who talk to them.

Schedule a meeting.

Legislators do not have permanent staff or offices at the State Capitol or their districts. For meetings at the State Capitol, the legislative schedule often prevents them from being able to schedule a specific meeting time, but send an email to say you will be at the Capitol on [X day] and would like to meet. To request a private meeting in your community, call or email the legislator to make the request and determine where to meet.

Prepare. Please see the resource page included in this toolkit for links to the Iowa Legislature website to learn about the legislators, committee assignments, and background. In terms of prioritizing which issues to discuss, consider what information they need relevant to when you meet, where you meet; and how much time you have.

MEETING OUTLINE

- **Introduce yourself and connect to your community.** *I am X from X, Iowa. I am/I do...*
- **Make a direct ask, explain why it is important, and provide an example of impact. Share documents and contact information after your conversation.**
 - *I am here to talk to you about ... ask you to support/oppose ...*
 - *This is important to (me or my work/organization/community/state) because ...*
 - *Will you support (issue, bill, funding)? Can we count on you to (vote yes/no, introduce a bill, and talk to other legislators)?*
 - *Do you have questions?*
- **Be Honest.** *It is ok not to know.* "I don't know, but I can find out and get back to you" provides a great opportunity to follow up. Credibility matters most- being a trusted, reliable source of information is the greatest asset to effective advocacy.
- **Stay on Message.** Don't allow them to distract you. Bring the conversation back to your request before the meeting ends, even if you must interrupt, e.g., "I want to hear more, but we only have a few minutes...can we count on your support for X?"
- **Thank you/Follow up.** Send a thank you email or letter, re-state your request, and include any promised information. Send a thank you even if they do not support your request. They may support a future request, but even if they never agree with you, 'how' you interact with them impacts your credibility and their respect for the issue.

TIPS FOR MEETING AND TALKING WITH STATE LEGISLATORS CONTINUED

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR MEETING LEGISLATORS AT THE STATE CAPITOL

During legislative session, each legislator has a clerk to help manage information and their schedules. The Capitol complex also employs extra staff and volunteers (Legislative 'Pages') to assist visitors. To let legislators know you have arrived:

STEP 1

Go to the main door outside the House or Senate chamber (2nd floor, Rotunda) and find the small table located near the entrance. You will find message slips on the table and seating charts posted above.

STEP 2

Fill out a message slip and hand it to the person staffing at the chamber entrance. They will deliver the message slip to the legislator. On the message slip fill in the date, time, your name or name of the group/organization, and include the 'seat number' of the legislator. The seat number is not their district number; it refers to the location of their desk on the chamber floor and allows Capitol staff to easily deliver your message. Find the seat number on the seating charts posted outside the chamber.

STEP 3

Wait near the chamber entrance for the legislator to come out to meet with you or for staff to call your name. If the legislator cannot talk to you, then, a Page or the legislator's clerk will call your name and let you know what is up. Most of the time, legislators will make every effort to meet with you. If they cannot, do not be discouraged if you meet with their clerk- these people help educate and manage information for the legislator during the session, so share with them what you want the legislator to know.

IOWA STATE CAPITOL COMPLEX INFORMATION



Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50319



Building Hours

- Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
(cannot enter after 4:45 p.m.)
- Saturday 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Committee Meeting Room Maps & Ground Floor

www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/resources/LegislativeCommitteeRoomMaps.pdf



Parking Information and Map

<https://das.iowa.gov/sites/default/files/general/pdf/CAPITOL%20COMPLEX%20PARKING.pdf>



Food

There are vending machines on the Ground Floor and a limited menu cafeteria that operates during session and usually closes by 2 pm.

RESOURCES AND INFORMATION

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR GOVERNOR REYNOLDS

- General Information: <https://governor.iowa.gov>
- Contact Information: <https://governor.iowa.gov/contact-office-governor>
- Register an Opinion Form:
https://iqconnect.lmhostediq.com/iqextranet/EForm.aspx?_cid=FSL_IA_GOV&_fid=100007
- Request Assistance Form
https://iqconnect.lmhostediq.com/iqextranet/EForm.aspx?_cid=FSL_IA_GOV&_fid=100008&iframe=Y
- Phone: 515.281.5211

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR STATE LEGISLATORS

- Find Your Legislator: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators>
- E-mail Address
These link to alphabetical lists of legislators that include email addresses. Generally, the e-mail address is firstname.lastname@legis.iowa.gov.
 - House: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/house>
 - Senate: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/senate>
- Phone Number
When the Legislature is in session, you can call the House or Senate switchboard.
 - House switchboard: 515-281-3221
 - Senate switchboard: 515-281-3371

STATE LEGISLATURE INFORMATION FROM, www.legis.iowa.gov

- [Find Your Legislator](#)
- [Daily Legislative Schedule](#)
- [Senators - alphabetical list](#)
- [Representatives - alphabetical list](#)
- [House and Senate Leadership](#)
- [House and Senate Committee Schedules](#)
- [Senate Committee Listing by Member](#)
- [House Committee Listing by Member](#)
- [Legislative District Maps](#)

ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING INFORMATION

- Bolder Advocacy: <https://bolderadvocacy.org/>
- National Council on Nonprofits: <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/everyday-advocacy>

IOWA U.S. CONGRESS DELEGATION



Senator Joni Ernst

Phone: 202.224.3254

Email: <https://www.ernst.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/contact>

Sign up for newsletter: <https://www.ernst.senate.gov/public/>



Senator Chuck Grassley

Phone: 202.224.3744

Email: www.grassley.senate.gov/constituents/questions-and-comments

Sign up for newsletter: <https://www.grassley.senate.gov/thescoop>



Representative Randy Feenstra (R-4)

Phone: 202.225.4426

Email: <https://feenstra.house.gov/contact>

Sign up for newsletter: <https://feenstra.house.gov/>



Representative Ashley Hinson (R-2)

Phone: 202.225.2911

Email: <https://hinson.house.gov/contact>

Sign up for newsletter: <https://hinson.house.gov/>



Representative Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-1)

Phone: 202.225.6576

Email: <https://millermeeks.house.gov/contact>

Sign up for newsletter: <https://millermeeks.house.gov/>



Representative Zach Nunn (R-3)

Phone: 202.225.5476

Email: <https://nunn.house.gov/>

Sign up for newsletter: <https://nunn.house.gov/contact/newsletter-subscribe>

TERMINOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

- **Party control or 'partisan split or makeup'** refers to the number of legislative seats represented by political parties, e.g., Republican, Democratic, Independent, Libertarian, etc.
- **Majority party.** The political party that has more seats in the legislature.
- **Minority party.** The political party that has fewer seats in the legislature.
- **Committee Chairs & Vice-chairs** are legislators from the majority party.
- **Committee Ranking member** is the legislator from the minority party leading that committee.
- **Appropriations Committees** work on the state budget bills.



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