



New Year, New Legislative Session

It's a new year, and a new legislative session is about to start. With the rush of the elections and holidays behind us, now is the time for advocates to gear up and set some goals. What issues are important to you? Are there things you'd like to see changed? Are there changes to programs that would help you live more independently, find or keep jobs, or simply move around in your community better?

We're here to help you achieve those goals. Our next issue of *INFONET* will have a new look for the new year, and we will spend more time on the issues that we know our readers say are important, like public transportation, jobs, savings accounts, and housing. Also ahead this year is our new "2019-2020 Guide to the Iowa Legislature" (in your mailboxes mid-January), Advocating for Change Day 2019 (April 10), lots of updates to our public forums list, and video advocacy tips from a variety of experts.

So get ready to put those new year's resolutions into action! In the words of William Faulkner, "Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world would do this, it would change the earth."

Committee assignments for the 2019 legislative session are now final and can be found at www.infonetiowa.org. A few highlights:

- **Human Resources Committee:** Sen. Marianne Miller-Meeks & Rep. Shannon Lundgren (Chairs), Sen. Mark Segebart & Rep. Ann Meyer (Vice Chairs), Sen. Liz Mathis & Rep. Beth Wessel-Kroeschell (Ranking Members)
- **Health/Human Services Budget Subcommittee:** Sen. Mark Costello & Rep. Joel Fry (Chairs), Sen. Jeff Edler & Rep. Mike Bergan (Vice Chairs), Sen. Amanda Ragan & Rep. Lisa Heddens (Ranking Members)

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Session Begins January 14

The legislative session will begin on Monday, January 14, and there will be lots of new faces under the golden dome. This is the first session of the new two-year “General Assembly,” which means legislators will be in Des Moines working until early May. Most legislators drive into town on Monday morning, and leave Thursday afternoon. They spend Friday-Sunday back home in their districts, hosting public forums, meeting with local groups, talking to constituents, and of course, spending time with their families. A few notes about this session:

- Legislators have until February 15 to ask for bills. Committee chairs have longer, but any individual legislator wanting to “sponsor” a bill (that is, have their name on it) must have that request in by Friday, February 15.
- There are two deadlines that are important in the Iowa Legislature, called “funnels.” The first funnel is on Friday, March 8 (when bills must be passed out of a committee). The second funnel is on Friday, April 5 (when bills have to be passed out of the House or Senate, and then out of committee in the other chamber).
- Legislators get a “per diem” to cover expenses for the first 110 days they are in Des Moines. This year, their per diems end on May 3. Legislators can and often do work beyond that deadline, but they have to cover their own mileage, meals, and hotels. After May 3, they also lose their clerks, who do their filing, correspondence, and other office work.
- Advocating for Change Day is on April 10. Put it on your calendars now, and we will let you know more about registration in the coming weeks. If you can’t make it or want to plan a local Capitol Day, read the next article!

Grants Available for Local Capitol Days

Iowans with Disabilities in Action will provide eight Capitol Day grants up to \$500 each for advocacy training and support to local advocacy groups who are interested in meeting with their legislators at the Iowa State Capitol and advocating on behalf of disability-related issues. To be eligible:

- Your group must have at least 10 people with a disability (up to 20).
- Your group must advocate for disability-related issues.
- Grants cannot be used to attend another organization’s lobby days.

As an Iowans with Disabilities in Action Capitol Day grant recipient, your group must:

- Schedule a Capitol Day on either Tuesday or Wednesday in the months of January through April.
- Participate in an advocacy training at the beginning of the Capitol Day.
- Set appointments with your legislators (Iowans with Disabilities in Action can assist).
- Provide a written recap of your Capitol Day within two weeks of your visit, including any follow-up communication with legislators

While at the capitol you may also want to watch a floor debate, attend a committee meeting, meet with other state agencies, or meet with Iowans with Disabilities in Action or Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council staff.

To apply for an Iowans with Disabilities in Action Capitol Day grant, please fill out a grant application (idaction.org/get-involved/capitol-days/). Call 866-432-2846 or email contactus@idaction.org with any questions. Grants are available on a first-come, first-served basis for eligible groups.



Reports, Reports, and More Reports

Legislators directed state agencies to convene dozens of work groups and committees over the summer to make recommendations on various issues. Those work groups invested hundreds of hours diving into these issues, and their reports are now available for review (check Issue 11 for more info at www.infonetiowa.org).

Here is a quick review of some of the biggest recommendations that lawmakers may consider in 2019:

- Establish a stable and predictable long-term funding structure for regional mental health and disability services that is appropriate to fully implement the vision of redesign and to support growth and innovation over time. This includes ending caps on property taxes and stopping the required “spend down” of fund balances.
- Equalize reimbursement for substance use providers, change to the way MH/DS community provider tiered rates are calculated, eliminate or reduce waiver waiting lists or wait times, and ensure sufficient Medicaid reimbursement for new “complex needs” services.
- Begin development of a children’s mental health and disability services system which has sustainable funding and which utilizes a full array of nationally recognized, evidence-based models of care.
- Establish a Home Modification grant program to help homeowners with disabilities or serious health conditions modify their homes to maintain safe, independent living options.
- Assure continued efforts to provide choice in membership to managed care organizations.
- Expand the availability, knowledge, skills, and compensation of professionals, paraprofessionals, and direct support workers as an essential element in building community capacity and enhancing statewide access to services.
- Maintain a robust Medicaid Program with a full array of services that serves its members, and ensure communications between and among providers, members, and MCOs is clear, consistent, and timely.

You can find these and other reports at www.legis.iowa.gov/publications/otherResources/reportsFiled. Select the agency from the drop-down box at the top of the page, and all the reports filed by that agency will be listed.

ISSUE FOCUS: School Choice

During the last two election cycles, many legislators listed “school choice” and “education reform” as one of their top issues. But what does that mean, and what are the implications for students with disabilities?

When most Iowans think of school choice, “vouchers” are the first thing that comes to mind. Vouchers give parents the option to use all or part of the public funds that would have gone to their child’s local public school to pay for private school tuition. In Iowa, parents have the choice to send their kids to private school, but taxpayers do not contribute to that tuition. Some groups (and legislators) would like to change that.

According to the *2016–2017 School Choice Yearbook*, there are 52 private school choice programs in 26 states and Washington, DC. Eleven of these state voucher programs are exclusively for students with disabilities: Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Wisconsin. Five states currently have targeted education savings accounts (ESAs) for students with disabilities: Arizona, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina (scheduled to start in 2018–2019), and Tennessee. Two states, South Carolina and Arizona, have tax credits (scholarship or individual) for students with disabilities.

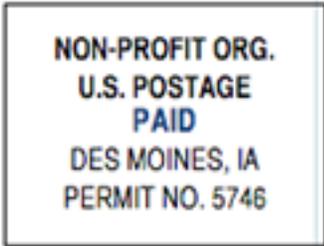
The National Council on Disabilities issued a report this month that reviewed these programs, and found:

- Parents and families using vouchers can lose access to rights; accountability can suffer; and vouchers might only cover a portion of private school cost, leaving a majority of families unable to access any choice at all.
- In states that operate voucher programs, state agencies are not doing enough to ensure parents are making an informed decision about giving up rights under IDEA and other federal statutes in exchange for public funds and vouchers, when a child with a disability is moved from public to private school.
- To benefit from a choice program, families need to be able to pay significant amounts from their own pockets for the cost of private school that vouchers do not cover, including transportation and time to coordinate their child’s program.
- Research on choice for students with disabilities is lacking. In the absence of data on discrimination, discipline,

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[FIRST] [LAST] OR CURRENT RESIDENT
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segregation, length of time using vouchers, or other programs and outcomes, families, state officials, and advocates are unable to fully understand the consequence and impact of vouchers.

- For the majority of school voucher programs, students must relinquish their rights under IDEA, including the right to assessments paid by the school district, an IEP, free appropriate public education (FAPE), least restrictive environment (LRE), and procedural due process protections for them and their families.

The report offered several recommendations for states considering voucher programs, including:

- Requiring private schools using vouchers to carry out IDEA obligations and including key components of special education services, including procedural or substantive requirements, the right to an impartial due process hearing if the private school fails to comply, and IEPs in voucher programs.
- Requiring private schools participating in voucher programs to adhere to Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and be judged according to the budget and resources of the state education agency or local education agency, rather than to the particular private school's budget.
- Requiring civil rights of students with disabilities be taken into account when developing programs and fully informing parents about their options and rights when they are making a decision about their child's education. The report states that much attention is needed to ensure that students with disabilities are protected from discrimination when using vouchers to attend private schools.
- Making state departments of education responsible for oversight of voucher programs and collection of data regarding students with disabilities.

You can read the entire report at: www.ncd.gov/sites/default/files/NCD_Choice-Vouchers_508_0.pdf.

Join Us for #StateSweep: Iowans with Disabilities in Action will visit all 99 counties over the next two years to learn more about how we can support you in your advocacy efforts. Ultimately, we want to get to know you and you to get to know us. Learn more and find out how you can get involved at www.idaction.org/state-sweep/.