



**infoNET**

# **ADVOCACY TOOLKIT**

ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE IN THE IOWA GENERAL ASSEMBLY



**PREPARE FOR YOUR DAY AT THE CAPITOL  
DISCOVER HELPFUL HINTS ON CONTINUING YOUR ADVOCACY**

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## ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit provides helpful information to prepare for your day at the Capitol and helpful hints on continuing your advocacy when you're back home.

Remember, the best time to start advocating is when your legislators are in their districts. The information and tools in this book can be used regardless of where you meet with your legislators.

WHEN ADVOCATING FOR ISSUES YOU FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT,

# DON'T FORGET

- **Your opinion matters!** This is your government and the process is better because you are involved.
- **Do not be intimidated.** You can be impressed by the building, the history and the institution, but you do not need to be intimidated when speaking to your elected official. Their job is to represent you. The only way they can do that is if you tell them what's on your mind.
- **Voters and constituents can have a voice and make a difference.** Lobbying isn't just for professionals and insiders.
- **Your advocacy assures that important issues are not forgotten.** Your representatives are learning about and making decisions on hundreds of bills each year, making it difficult to keep track of every issue.
- **There are endless ways to advocate!** In addition to face-to-face meetings, use mail, email, Facebook, Twitter and your local newspaper to get your thoughts heard.
- **Relationships are very important to increase your influence.** Be sure to follow up your face-to-face meeting with continued correspondence. Have a goal of building a long-term relationship.
- **Elected officials need you!** Each day they are pressured to make important decisions, and they could use your encouragement and support.

Your elected official's  
job is to represent **YOU**.

The only way they can  
do that is if you tell them  
what's on **YOUR MIND**.

# 2019 | 2020 GUIDE TO THE IOWA LEGISLATURE



This **Guide to the Iowa Legislature** combines the information advocates need into a single, user-friendly resource. This guide is available at no cost to people receiving *infoNET*. To subscribe, register with the Iowans with Disabilities in Action network at [www.idaction.org](http://www.idaction.org).

## WHICH LEGISLATORS TO VISIT

Start by talking with your legislators. If you don't know who your legislators are, don't worry, you can look them up. Visit <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find> and enter your address.

Once you have talked to your legislators, try talking to legislators who serve on committees that handle issues of interest to you. For example, if you are interested in transportation issues, talk to a legislator who serves on the Transportation Committee. If you are interested in HCBS waiver waiting lists, talk with a legislator from the Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee. A list of committee members can be found in the Guide to the Iowa Legislature.

### **HOUSE & SENATE COMMITTEE MEMBERS YOU MAY WANT TO TALK TO:**

House Human Resources Committee

House Transportation Committee

House Education Committee

House Appropriations Committee

Senate Human Resources Committee

Senate Transportation Committee

Senate Education Committee

Senate Appropriations Committee

Joint Health & Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee

## TIPS FOR MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS

### **LEGISLATORS HAVE MANY RESPONSIBILITIES.**

A normal day for legislators begins at around 8:30 a.m. Their days are filled with debate in the House or Senate chambers, caucuses (which are not open to the public) and committee meetings (which are open to the public). You will need to be patient when trying to meet with your legislators.

The schedules for each day are listed on boards in front of each chamber on the second floor of the Capitol. The House Lobby Lounge includes television sets with scrolling subcommittee and committee meetings. Subcommittees are taped to a bulletin board in the Senate Lobby Lounge.

Legislators do not have staff or offices. They each have a desk on the floor of the House or Senate, and each legislator has a clerk that helps them keep up with daily paperwork. The clerks are often family members of the legislators or friends. They can help you locate your legislators if they are not available when you send in your notes.

### **FIRST, GO TO THE HOUSE OR SENATE CHAMBER**

Both are located on the second floor of the Capitol. The House is on the north side and the Senate is on the south side. If you look at the Law Library in the middle of the second floor, the House is on your right and the Senate is on your left.

### **NEXT, SEND A MESSAGE TO YOUR LEGISLATOR THROUGH THE DOORKEEPER**

- DO NOT try to walk into the chambers to locate your legislator. The public is only allowed in the chambers when they are with a legislator, and only after they get permission from leadership. There is a doorkeeper system that requires you to fill out a “slip” and send it in to your legislator.
  - The slip is yellow for the House, pink for the Senate. They are located at tables directly in front of the chamber entrance. You will be given some at your Capitol Day training.
  - The slip requires you to fill in your name, the name of the legislator you wish to contact and their SEAT NUMBER (not to be confused with their district number). Legislators are listed alphabetically on a sheet of paper located on the board above the table, which also lists legislator seat numbers.
- \* *If you come with a group, only fill out one slip for the group. Instead of listing all the names of people there, just say “a group from \_\_\_\_\_” or “17 people from \_\_\_\_\_.”*

## TIPS FOR MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS

### SEND A MESSAGE TO YOUR LEGISLATOR THROUGH THE DOORKEEPER (CONTINUED...)

- Circle the option called “waiting to see you.” It is also good to write on the note where you are from (for example, Jane Doe of Belmont, Iowa) so legislators know if you have come a long way to see them. Also, include your cell phone number so they can reach you before you leave the building if they cannot see you immediately.
- Hand the slip to the doorkeeper and wait for a response. Sometimes it may take your legislator 10-15 minutes to come out. (They may be finishing up a call or conversation before coming out to talk to you.)
- If your legislator is not available or not in their seat, a page or doorkeeper will come back out and call your name. You may need to listen closely as the rotunda can be loud. If your note does not come back out it means your legislator was there and will be out soon to talk to you.
- Sometimes a staff person will come out to speak to you if the legislator is occupied. Be polite and treat this staff person as you would the legislator — a lot of times the staff person is a friend, relative, daughter/son or spouse of the legislator.
- Be prepared and be patient. The Capitol can be noisy and crowded, and you may feel jostled if the crowd that day is particularly large.

### SAMPLE MESSAGE SLIPS:

**THE SENATE**

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

TO: \_\_\_\_\_

SEAT NO: \_\_\_\_\_

MESSAGE:  
.....  
.....

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

CELL PHONE #: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ IS AT THE REAR OF THE  
CHAMBER AND REQUESTS TO SEE YOU  
 AT THE MAIN DOOR

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

SEAT NO: \_\_\_\_\_

REPRESENTATIVE: \_\_\_\_\_

OR CLERK: \_\_\_\_\_  
(NAME)

OF: \_\_\_\_\_  
(TOWN, COMPANY, ORGANIZATION)

1. IS WAITING TO SEE YOU

2. HAS LEFT LITERATURE

3. HAS LEFT THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE:  
.....  
.....

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

AT THE MAIN DOOR

## TIPS FOR MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS

### IF YOU ARE ABLE TO MEET WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR AT THE CAPITOL:



- **DON'T BE NERVOUS**  
Be yourself. Remember your legislators are there to represent you!
- **GREET YOUR LEGISLATOR WITH A SMILE**
- **BE BRIEF**  
Legislators have very little time during session. Use an "elevator speech," what you would say if you only had the time to talk while riding in an elevator with them. Use our message development sheet on page 15 to help you get started.
- **USE YOUR LEGISLATOR'S TITLES, SENATOR OR REPRESENTATIVE**  
Think of it as their first name.
- **CLEARLY IDENTIFY YOURSELF**  
State your name, where you are from and the group you are with at the Capitol that day.

*" HELLO, I'M JANE DOE FROM BELMONT, IOWA WITH THE IOWANS WITH DISABILITIES IN ACTION GROUP. "*

- **FOCUS ON ONE, MAYBE TWO ISSUES**  
If you mix in too many issues, it will overwhelm them. Understand that it may be a tough budget year, but make sure they understand why your priorities are important.
- **BE COURTEOUS**  
Ask them what they might do to help you with your priority issue. (Is there something you might be able to do to help us with this? Is this something you could support? What do you recommend we do to help make this a priority?)
- **THANK THEM**  
Thank them for their support or consideration if they're not ready to commit to a position.



## TIPS FOR MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS

IF YOU ARE ABLE TO MEET WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR AT THE CAPITOL (CONTINUED...)

- **DON'T BURN BRIDGES!**

You may not agree with your legislator on this issue, but they might be there for you on the next one. You don't need to let them off the hook — tell them you'll keep trying to get them information that will help them reconsider their position. But remember that advocacy is about building a relationship — and trust — with your elected officials.

- **SEND THEM A FOLLOW-UP NOTE!**

A short note or email from you to follow-up on your conversation is an excellent way to become a resource for future communication, and it is a great reminder of your visit. Remember, you only have to remember one person's name (your legislator); your legislator has to remember all of your group's names and others that are at the Capitol that day. Emails or letters are a good reminder for them.

### IF YOU DON'T GET TO TALK TO YOUR LEGISLATOR:

- If your slip comes back out and your legislator is not available, take the time to write a short "sorry I missed you" note that states very briefly the issue you wanted to talk to them about.
- It's okay to continue writing on the back of the note if you run out of room.
- Circle the option "Has Left the Following Message" and send the note back.
- Be sure to mark the time of day and date that you left the note.

If you are not able to talk to your legislator, send the note back in and ask to have it left on their desk. Write something like:

*"I was here today with lowans with Disabilities in Action and [your local group]. I live in [city] and would like to take a few minutes today to talk to you about our priorities. I will be here until [time] should you want to call me on my cell phone [555-555-5555]."*

OR

*"I will e-mail you more information about the issues I came to discuss."*

## 12 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY

It is important to prepare before you talk to your legislators.

1

### IDENTIFY YOUR CAUSE

- What do you want? Focus on the solution, not the complaint!
- Ask for what you want, but be willing to compromise.
- See the big picture.
- Define the problem. What do you want fixed?
- Is there more than one solution?

2

### DO YOUR HOMEWORK

- Know the issue and make it real.
- Gather facts and expert information.
- List the pros and cons of your solution.
- Form a response to the cons.
- Track legislation and learn the legislative process.

3

### KNOW YOUR LEGISLATORS

- Visit the legislative website ([www.legis.state.ia.us](http://www.legis.state.ia.us)) or local library for help.
- Contact your county auditor or state/local election commissioner.
- Connect on social media. (Most legislators have an online presence on Facebook, Twitter or a website.)

4

### RALLY THE TROOPS

- Who else supports your cause (legislators, businesses, organizations)? Enlist their support.
- Decide on common themes so your messages resonate.
- Help your legislators understand why your position is important to their constituents.
- Fight where your legislators live through grassroots at home.
- Be prepared. Give legislators information they can use.

## 12 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY

**5****BUILD  
SUPPORT FOR  
YOUR CAUSE**

- Use the media.
- Work as a group — strength in numbers.
- Consider rallies and other public events to get your message out.

**6****DETERMINE  
WHO CAN  
HELP YOU**

- City council/mayor/county officials
- Businesses/civic organizations
- Child welfare
- Legislators
- Lobbyists
- Media/news editors

**7****COMMUNICATE**

- Attend city council meetings.
- Make appointments with the person selected in step 6.
- Make telephone calls.
- Visit your State Capitol — and lobby!
- Write letters or emails.
- Invite your legislator to a community event or a fundraiser.

**8****KNOW WHAT  
TO WRITE  
AND/OR SAY**

A worksheet is included on page 13 to help develop your message before talking to legislators. In short, you should:

- State the problem.
- State the solution.
- Put the issue into context with a personal story.
- Ask for help.
- Say thank you! Then follow up.

## 12 STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY

9

### KEEP IT SHORT AND SIMPLE

- Be courteous and respectful.
- Be brief, concise and to the point.
- Be informative and truthful.
- Be positive. Always make your case without being critical of others.

10

### SUPPORT THOSE WHO SUPPORT YOU

- Join organizations sympathetic to your cause.
- Support candidates who support you.
- Remember there are no permanent friends or enemies.
- Do not take traditional friends for granted.
- Never write off a legislator just because of party affiliation.
- Don't make legislative enemies you may need in the future.

11

### REMEMBER, IT'S NOT PERSONAL

- Listen to your opponents with the same respect and attention you want.
- Try to understand their position.
- Keep channels of communication open.
- Seek compromise and be diplomatic.

12

### DON'T GIVE UP OR GIVE IN

- Remember Rome wasn't built in a day.
- Be persistent and consistent.
- Aim for consensus rather than victory. Be willing to settle for making progress.
- Stay committed. You have a compelling, energizing reason to keep fighting until you accomplish your goal.

## HOW TO TELL YOUR STORY

Follow these tips when talking or writing to your elected officials.

1. **BE POLITE.** Treat policy makers with respect, even if they don't agree with you.
2. **BE PERSISTENT BUT PATIENT.** Policy change takes time. Don't give up.
3. **PRACTICE AND PREPARE.** Practice talking to your elected officials — it really does help. Think about what you want to say before you meet with, write or call them. Use the Message Worksheet on the next page.
4. **BE CLEAR.** Stick to a simple and clear message. Get to the point quickly, and don't forget to let them know what you want them to do.
5. **BE PERSONAL.** Your story means a lot to decision makers. It helps them look at issues differently and see issues from your perspective.
6. **BE HONEST.** Never lie. Be a reliable source of information to your policy makers.

### MESSAGE WORKSHEET

Before you talk to legislators, use the following worksheet to develop your message.

**YOUR ISSUE/STORY (IN 50 WORDS OR LESS):**

**WHAT DO YOU WANT THEM TO DO (IN 50 WORDS OR LESS):**

**THREE KEY POINTS TO MAKE:**

1.

2.

3.

## ADVOCATING FROM HOME

When you're back at home, there are several ways you can continue to let your legislators know how you feel about the issues that you care about. You can call them, write letters or emails, meet with them face-to-face and organize others to advocate, too. Use the method you like best and are most comfortable doing.



### PHONE

- Call your legislators at the Capitol.  
**Senators: 515.281.3371**  
**Representatives: 515.281.3221**
- Call your legislators at home when the session is done. Ask your legislators how to call them after session ends.
- Call the governor and encourage him/her to help solve the problem.  
**Governor: 515.281.5211**
- Call friends, families and others you know and ask them to call!



### FACE-TO-FACE

- Go to local forums. An updated list of forums can be found at **[www.infonetiowa.org](http://www.infonetiowa.org)**.
- Invite legislators to local events, open houses or plan a discussion with friends.
- Ask your legislator to meet and talk about issues over a cup of coffee.
- Visit the Capitol!

## ADVOCATING FROM HOME



### WRITING

- Write or email your legislators. The address is:  
**Sen. \_\_\_\_\_ or Rep. \_\_\_\_\_**  
**State Capitol**  
**Des Moines, Iowa 50319**
- Email legislators by using our Grassroots Action Center at **[www.infonetiowa.org](http://www.infonetiowa.org)**.
- Ask your legislators how to stay in contact after session ends. (Then do it!)
- Write or email the governor. Emails can be sent through his website at **[www.governor.iowa.gov/contact](http://www.governor.iowa.gov/contact)**. Regular mail can be sent to:  
**1007 East Grand Ave.**  
**Des Moines, Iowa 50319**
- Write a Letter to the Editor to the Des Moines Register or your local newspaper.  
**Des Moines Register Editorial Writers**  
**PO Box 957**  
**Des Moines, Iowa 50304**



### ORGANIZE OTHERS

- Talk to your friends, family and others to build support. Ask them to call, write or contact their legislators.
- Speak to community and civic groups.
- Organize informational meetings and invite others.
- Get others to attend local forums, or plan your own!
- Plan your own Capitol Day!
- Contact ID Action for more ideas and grant opportunities



Iowans with Disabilities in Action (ID Action) is a nonpartisan, statewide initiative dedicated to generating greater civic and political participation among people with disabilities.

**1-866-432-2846**

**WWW.IDACTION.ORG**

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