

Basics of Civic Engagement with the Iowa State Legislature

Brief background on legislature

IA has a citizen legislature where many of the members have other jobs. Typically, the legislature is in session from January to April of each year. There will likely be a short special session this year. Your role as a citizen advocating for change is to help legislator understand the problem with the current situation.

Before contacting representatives

Become an expert on the subject and be able to articulate not just the problem, but also a proposed solution. Understand what exactly you are asking for, and be consistent. You should craft the message to the current situation. It helps to humanize the issue instead of relying on statistics. It is also important to identify who the key legislators are and to identify any existing relationships with members.

Mechanics of talking to your legislators

State legislators are much more accessible than members of the US Congress. The first step is to identify your representatives via this link [Iowa Legislature - Find Your Legislator](#). With that information, you can begin contacting both representatives and senators from home and work districts. When setting up meetings you sometimes need to be a bit tenacious.

Once contact has been made, share why this matter is important for you and your fellow constituents. Do not assume that the legislators are experts on the subject, and offer to provide information to help their understanding. This important issue is a bipartisan issue, so do not limit your engagement to one party or the other. If you are unable to secure a meeting, you can send them an email providing background on the current childcare situation and how you have been impacted, and request their support of the policy proposals put forth by this taskforce. In either case, be sure to thank them for their time.

Timing

You should be seeding your ideas and proposals now. Legislators generally establish their agenda and priorities prior to session. You want them to be well aware of your issues before session begins. During session, you should continue to interact with legislators, reminding them why your issue is important as well as offering to provide additional expertise. This can be through informal briefings, receptions, or written materials.

Each of you is capable of confidently engaging with the state legislature and you all have the ability to effect change. The legislature works for the citizens of the state. If you continue to promote this issue and make it a priority, it is more likely to be a priority for the legislature when it is in session.