

Visiting the Iowa Capitol



How to Meet, Talk with and Educate Your State Legislators

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What is Your Legislator's Job?

LAWMAKING

- Studying, discussing and voting on proposed legislation
- Allocating money to state agencies and programs
- Creating, modifying and abolishing state laws and programs as necessary
- Settling conflicts, righting injustices and making authoritative decisions

REPRESENTING

- Serving constituents living in the district
- Doing what is in the best interest of the state as a whole
- Acting as a liaison between citizens and state government

MONITORING

- Overseeing the work of departments and agencies funded by the Legislature
- Ensuring that laws are being carried out according to legislative intent
- Confirming the Governor's appointments and responding to vetoes
- Keeping the lawmaking process open and honest

Your Iowa legislators do more than just vote "aye" or "nay" on bills. Your legislators help set the quality of life in Iowa. That's an important job.

Visiting the Capitol

Thank you so much for coming to Des Moines to meet with your legislators!

You are about to participate in one of the most important and effective strategies to influence the legislative process and help ensure future public support for programs and services for young children.

Furthermore, you can take pride in knowing that your visit to your legislative delegation contributes to our great democratic process and sets an example for others to follow.

The purpose of your visit is to educate legislators about the importance of investing in our youngest Iowans.

Before you arrive in Des Moines

- **If traveling in a group, designate one individual to act as a spokesperson.** This will save time and avoid confusion when you are speaking with your legislator. This person can start the meeting by identifying your group, make introductions and keep the meeting moving along.
- **Have one person designated to take notes.** This is very important as a way of keeping track of what is said and for making sure any information requested by your legislator gets back to him or her. There is a handy form for doing this provided on the next page.
- **Make sure you have the points you want to make thought out ahead of time.** Concentrate on just a few main points, and have your facts ready! It is very good to have a one-page summary of information pertinent to your community to hand your legislator. It should contain information about the number of children you serve, programs and services, etc.
- **Be sure to arrive early.** Parking can be hard to find. Make sure you leave enough time to park and walk to the designated meeting place.

When meeting with your legislator

- Have your spokesperson start the meeting by identifying your group as made up of constituents who are interested in _____ (i.e. the early care and education of young children). Identify the local partnership as a part of this group.
- Be sure to have each person introduce themselves, stating their name, where they live, their role as parent, educator of young children, child care provider or operator, minister, social worker, commissioner, etc. Don't take too long in doing this. The main point here is to give the legislator a sense of who is visiting him or her and that you are constituents.
- Be sure the appointed person takes notes of what is said at the meeting.
- If you have specific points you are making, have the person most familiar with the issue on a personal basis do it. It is very effective for people to illustrate the real-world impact of policy decisions. (For example, having a mother who lost subsidy support tell the legislator how it has hurt her ability to work.)
- Give the Representative, Senator or staff member your printed material.
- Conclude by asking: What is of most interest to you? What concerns do you have? Can we count on you working with us during the upcoming legislative session?

What to Expect

Some Suggestions for First-Time Visitors

The House and Senate are located on the second floor of the Capitol. The House is on the right-hand side and the Senate is on the left-hand side. Unless you have a previously scheduled appointment and meeting location, you must fill out a slip to meet with your legislator. The slips are located on small tables outside the chambers. The House uses yellow slips and the Senate uses pink slips (see samples on page 10). After filling out the slip, you give it to the doorman. The doorman will see if your legislator is in the chambers.

If your legislator is not in the chamber, leave your materials with the doorman. If your legislator is in the chambers, the doorman will tell you so.

When the legislator appears, your spokesperson (that may be you!) can start by introducing him or her self and their position. You might say:

“Hello, Representative Smith. My name is Mary Teller and I am the owner/operator of the Happy Child Early Learning Center located in Fort Dodge. Thank you for finding the time in your busy schedule to meet with us (me). I am going to act as a facilitator for our group’s meeting with you.”

If you already know your legislator, tell him or her it’s good to see them again and ask about their family. This is always a good conversation starter.

At some point early in the visit take a moment and let each member of your group introduce him or herself. Be sure to tell the legislator what you do and let him or her know where you live. It is important that the legislator knows that you are his or her constituent.

After the introductions, state why you are there. You might say:

Representative Smith, I would like to give you some information about the importance of investing in our youngest lowans. This flier ...

Or, more generally:

We thought it important to come to Des Moines during this legislative session to let you know about the impact that ECI, Shared Visions, Child Care (name program) has been having on children in (your own) County, and share with you our thoughts and concerns about the future of the program as you head into this legislative session.”

Some general suggestions....

- Share success stories. Legislators love to hear these stories, especially ones about how investing in early care and education, health, social programs, etc., has improved the lives of a child or a child and his or her family. The more personal the better. One personal story is often as effective as a lot of data.
- But if you have data, share them. It makes an impact for a legislator to hear that through your program you have created 18 new childcare spaces or that you have reduced the waiting list by 30 percent.
- Tell the legislator about the programs and initiatives you have been working on during the last six months or a year.

At the end of your visit, be sure to thank the legislator for his or her time. Leave them with information to look at. Invite them to come visit the next time they are back home.

Be sure to send a follow-up thank you letter! A thank you letter allows you to emphasize your main points once again and make any additional points you may have forgotten.

SAMPLE LETTER TO LEGISLATORS THANKING THEM FOR A VISIT

Date

The Honorable _____
Iowa General Assembly
Iowa State Capitol
Des Moines, IA 50319

Dear (Representative/Senator) _____:

I am writing to once again thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to meet with us during our visit to the legislature. We appreciate the opportunity we had to discuss the state of children in _____ County and the role that early care and education is playing to improve their lives and help insure that each child arrives at school ready to succeed.

We hope you found the information we left with you useful. We know you share our hopes and concerns about children in _____ County, and will be working hard to *(in this space, you can reiterate the main points you made in your conversation. For example: "working hard to insure that early care and education is a priority.)*

Please let me reiterate our offer of assistance. If you are ever in need of any local data or have questions about our work please let me know. We also encourage you to come and visit our partnership offices and childcare facilities to see first hand the work we are doing. We would welcome being your host for the day.

Thank you for seeing us and for all you are doing to keep young children and their needs a priority in the public agenda.

Sincerely,

Name
Title of Organization

Basic Advocacy is Easy

Do

- Be Polite. The proper form of address is: “Representative Smith” or “Senator Smith.”
- Be yourself! You don’t have to use fancy language or big words. It is most effective if you talk to your legislator in a simple, straightforward fashion.
- See everyone you can. Don’t write off a legislator because of his or her past lack of support. You never know when a legislator may be rethinking their position. Also, be sure to see those legislators who support you even if you have seen them recently. They appreciate and need your continued affirmations of support. They also need to see your commitment!
- Concentrate on things back home. Your legislator is interested in what state investments have done to improve the lives of families and children and the ongoing needs of his or her constituents. They are less interested in what is happening statewide.
- Be specific about what you want the legislator to do. Concentrate on one or two items.
- If you are in a group, choose one member to be a primary spokesperson. This does not mean that others can’t speak, but it does help to have one person make the initial comments and main points.
- If your legislator is unavailable, leave materials with the page (doorman)
- Be proud of your hard work and be enthusiastic about the future.

Don't

- Be shy about being with your legislator. Remember, it is his or her job to be there to meet with you and listen to your concerns. You have a right to be there!
- Be discouraged if your legislator can't meet with you, is late, or misses the appointment. He or she really does care about meeting you, but sometimes things happen at the last moment in committee meetings or on the floor they **MUST** be present for.
- Never get angry. Even if a legislator just won't be supportive, thank him or her for their time and offer to be of assistance in the future should they find themselves in need of information.
- Never threaten a legislator. They understand that all of their actions at the General Assembly will be at issue in the next election.
- Don't lie or misrepresent facts. Legislators will usually find out at some point and it will hurt your credibility.

Meeting with Legislators while in Chambers

When legislators are meeting in session (in chambers), advocates should follow these easy steps to call their Senator or Representative out to the Rotunda for meetings:

1. Go to the main door of the appropriate chamber located on 2nd floor of the Capitol. The Senate chamber is on the south side of the Rotunda and the House chamber is on the north.
2. Fill out a message slip (see examples below) and hand to the doorman. He will deliver the message slip to the legislator. Walk back down the chamber steps and wait in the Rotunda near the chamber. (Be sure to check the area where you will be waiting on the Senate message slip).
3. If available, your legislator will come out and call your name. If the legislator cannot talk with you at that time, a Page will alert you that he/she is not currently available.

THE SENATE	
Date: _____	Time _____
To: _____	
Seat No:	*****
Message:	

_____ is at the rear of the chamber and requests to see you: _____ in the lounge _____ at the door	

House of Representatives	
Representative:	
Seat Number: _____	
Mr. Mrs. Ms.	
Of:	
1. Is waiting to see you; 2. Has left literature	
3. Has left the following message:	
Date:	Time: _____
Delivered by:	
FRONT DOOR	

How to Contact Your Legislators

State Senators

By mail

The Honorable _____
Iowa Senate
State Capitol
Des Moines, IA 50319

Begin any correspondence to your senator with the following greeting:
Dear Senator _____

By phone (during the session): (515) 281-3371; TDD: (515) 281-3789

By e-mail: (firstname.lastname)@legis.iowa.gov

State Representatives

By mail

The Honorable _____
Iowa House of Representatives
State Capitol
Des Moines, IA 50319

Begin any correspondence to your representative with the following greeting:
Dear Representative _____

By phone (during the session): (515) 281-3221; TDD: (515) 281-8455

By e-mail: (firstname.lastname)@legis.iowa.gov

Updated information from Legislative Basics 2.17 2/11/2003

How to Contact the Governor

By mail

The Honorable _____
Office of the Governor
State Capitol
Des Moines, IA 50319

Dear Governor _____:

By phone

(515) 281-5211

Ask to speak to the staff member that handles the issue you wish to address

Online

<https://governor.iowa.gov/contact/>

How to Contact the Lt. Governor

By mail

The Honorable _____
Office of the Lt. Governor
State Capitol
Des Moines, IA 50319

Dear Lt. Governor _____:

By phone

(515) 281-5211

Ask to speak to the staff member that handles the issue you wish to address

Online

<https://ltgovernor.iowa.gov/contact/>

Updated information from Legislative Basics 2.18 2/11/2003

Where and How to Get Legislative Information

Legislative Information Office

The Legislative Information Office (LIO) is the primary contact for information concerning the Iowa General Assembly. The LIO responds to inquiries from the general public, public and private agencies, and business interests with nonpartisan information about the Iowa General Assembly. The office includes two public-access computer terminals, for any member of the public to access legislative information using the Legislator's computer system Iowa General Assembly web site (www.legis.iowa.gov).

The Legislative Information Office is located on the ground floor of the Iowa State Capitol, Room G160, at the foot of the east stairs.

Hours: 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday (extended hours when Legislature is in session).

Legislative Information Office
Iowa State Capitol, Room G16
East 9th and Grand Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50319

Phone: (515) 281-5129 (LIO has no toll-free telephone number)
(515) 281-5869 provides a voice recording of daily schedules for *Today in the Senate* and *Today in the House*, as well as interim schedules

Law Library

Information and research on the Code of Iowa; research on past legislation (1846 to present); 50 state codes and case law information; legal journals and individual titles on special subjects; federal laws; regulation and case law.

The Iowa State Law Library is located on the second floor, west end of the Capitol.

Hours: 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Phone: (515) 281-5124

The Law Library has a public-access photocopier and fax machine for outgoing information (a small fee is charged).

Every Child Counts is the advocacy initiative of



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