

Legislative Session 2023 Ends!

The legislative session adjourned on May 4th, 2023. The following bills were passed by the legislature the last week of session:

Property Tax Reform: This bill is the first of a multi-year effort to rein in property taxes. It controls the growth of property taxes, streamlines the system, and increases transparency in property taxes and local government spending. Total property tax relief is \$100 million. It does this by:

1. Providing a series of controls to protect taxpayers in which levy rates are automatically reduced when the growth in assessment values goes past a certain level
2. Simplifying and consolidating the number of levies used by local governments
3. Limiting levies that seem open-ended for additional spending,
4. Reinstating hard levy caps: property tax relief of items 1-4 is \$45 million
5. Providing \$57 million in increased property tax exemptions for seniors 65 and over and veterans;
6. Requires local governments to contact property owners and notify them of upcoming changes to their property tax bill
7. Requires local governments to give property owners a standardized statement with consistent and clear information about the local budget
8. No new school districts can utilize PERL levy
9. Bond issues restricted to be voted on only in the November general election in even-numbered years (presidential & mid-terms) when voter participation is highest.

Small Election Omnibus Bill: Does the following:

1. Removes Iowa from ERIC (Electronic Registration Information Center) – an organization Iowa joined in 2018 to help clean up voter rolls but it was doing a sloppy job for the money Iowa paid in as dues. Instead, and thankfully, we have good and faithful citizen volunteers who are quietly cleaning up our voter rolls – doing the job ERIC was supposed to have done.
2. A tie vote in a primary election for state senator or state representative is decided by the precinct captains of that party in that

legislative district instead of the current way of drawing names out of a hat.

3. Precinct caucus participants must be physically present at the caucus meeting to participate. After that, state political parties may adopt their own rules concerning participating in and voting at a precinct caucus.

School Investigations Reform: Reports have surfaced of bad actors in schools going from one school to the next avoiding accountability and kids continuing to become victims. Here are the highlights:

1. Requires mandatory reporting be made for reports of child abuse for all ages, not just 12 and under.
2. Any school employee who is 18 or older is now a mandatory reporter.
3. Any report by a mandatory reporter must include the name of the school employee that was the perpetrator if known.
4. Prohibits schools from entering an agreement with an employee that is leaving the school that prohibits discussion of an incident or investigation with government authorities or a prospective employer.
5. Also prohibits schools from entering an agreement with an employee that waives liability related to an incident or allegation of wrongdoing.
6. Schools must provide the Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE) the results of an investigation of a licensed employee.
7. Schools must notify a school seeking to hire one of their employees of any complaint and investigation of that employee if the prospective school employer asks.
8. Schools must check with the BOEE to see if a prospective licensed employee has a completed case or a case pending.

Midwifery: Allows the licensing of the practice of certified professional midwives. Establishes a Board of Midwifery under the Board of Nursing. Requires education set forth by the Midwifery Education Accreditation Council. Allows a midwife to administer certain drugs. If a patient attended by a midwife is transferred to the hospital, the hospital is not liable for actions taken by the midwife. Requires a midwife consult with a doctor or certified nurse midwife (different from a certified professional midwife) in the case of high-risk pregnancies. Requires insurance to cover the services of certified professional midwives.

Farmer's Market Bill: Farmer's market vendors who sell items that need refrigerated and who desire to sell in more than one county will be

allowed to get an annual license costing \$150 that is valid across the entire state. This eliminates the county-by-county fees with one license that would allow vendors to sell across the state.

Education Appropriations Budget: Appropriates \$1 billion for Regents universities, School for the Deaf, School for the Blind, Iowa Tuition Grant, Community Colleges, National Guard Tuition Grant, Last Dollar Scholarship (Future Ready Iowa Workforce program), All Iowa Opportunity Scholarship, Gap Tuition Assistance, etc.

Standing Appropriations Budget: Appropriates \$3.4 billion for K-12 schools, \$30 million for K-12 school transportation fund, \$9 million for private school transportation, \$107 million for new ESA program, \$378 million for tax credits, \$38 million for the legislature, \$127 million mental health services through MHDS, etc.

Rebuild Iowa Infrastructure Budget: Appropriates \$255 million in funding for many various infrastructure throughout the state, such as the Industrial Tech Building at UNI, Veterinary Diagnostic Lab at ISU, Iowa State Fairgrounds, buildings in the prison system, technology projects, communications systems, renewable fuels infrastructure fund, Destination Iowa grants, CAT grants, etc.

Economic Development Budget: Appropriates a total of \$76 million for programs administered by the Economic Development Authority, the Iowa Finance Authority, and Iowa Workforce Development.

Judicial Branch Budget: Appropriates \$212 million for the courts in the judicial branch, a \$3.2 million increase.

Justice Systems Budget: Appropriates \$688 million for justice-related departments, including the Attorney General, the Dept. of Corrections, the Homeland Security and Emergency Management Dept., the Public Defender's office, the Department of Public Safety, the Iowa State Patrol, and the Fire Marshal's office.

Dairy Innovation Fund: Establishes a dairy innovation fund and program under the Dept. of Agriculture. Eligible projects will be small dairy businesses that look to expand or remodel, mobile dairy processing businesses, dairy businesses looking to update with technology such as robotics or computerized equipment.

Sex Offenders Nursing Home Medicaid Rates: This bill requires a study to establish an increase in the Medicaid rate to provide services for criminal sex offenders because they must be housed separately from other nursing home residents.

Child Care Assistance: This bill appropriates federal funding for child care assistance and raises the income eligibility for child care assistance to 160% Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and below. It also establishes work requirement for the child's parent of a minimum of 32 hours per week.

ESA Program Sign-Up

Governor Reynolds has announced that applications for Students First Educations Savings Accounts (ESAs) will be accepted starting May 31, 2023 and ending June 30, 2023. The Students First Act was signed into law earlier this year and will provide state funding for eligible students who attend accredited nonpublic schools starting in the 2023-2024 school year.

Additionally, the State Board of Education today adopted administrative rules that specify definitions for the program, eligibility requirements for participation, parameters for the application process, and program administration and accountability.

All incoming kindergarteners and all K-12 students currently enrolled in a public school district are eligible for the ESA program. Families whose children currently attend an accredited nonpublic school are also eligible for ESAs based on their annual income during the first two years of the program. For the 2023-2024 school year, income eligibility is 300 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL); and 400 percent FPL for the 2024-2025 school year. Beginning in the 2025-2026 school year, all K-12 students in Iowa will be eligible for an ESA regardless of income.

The following rules specify some eligibility requirements for students currently attending an accredited nonpublic school:

- Parents or guardians of students currently enrolled in an accredited nonpublic school will verify their income eligibility using “net income” from their 2022 state tax form.

- Household size will be determined by the number of people who reside together and are related by birth, marriage, adoption, legal guardianship, or by placement in the home through a state agency. “Household” includes parents, student applicants, and other children who share at least one parent by birth, adoption, a parent’s current marriage, or placement in the home through a state agency.
- Students must be enrolled full time at an accredited nonpublic school.

The [administrative rules](#) are posted in their entirety on the Iowa Department of Education’s [ESA webpage](#), along with answers to [frequently asked questions](#) about the program. Parents interested in applying for an ESA are encouraged to sign up for notifications when information is updated on the website.

Parents will complete and submit applications through an online system which the Department of Education, Office of the Chief Information Officer, and other state agencies are now implementing with Odyssey, the vendor selected to administer the ESA program. Webinars will be offered to assist parents with the application process when the system launches on May 31.

Feel free to contact me with ideas, thoughts, and concerns. My phone is 319-987-3021 or you can email me at sandy.salmon@legis.iowa.gov . I want to hear what you are thinking and will listen to your input. Together we will work to make a difference for the future of Iowa. Thank you very much for the honor of representing you!

Sincerely,

Sandy