



# infoNET

IOWA'S DISABILITY POLICY RESOURCE

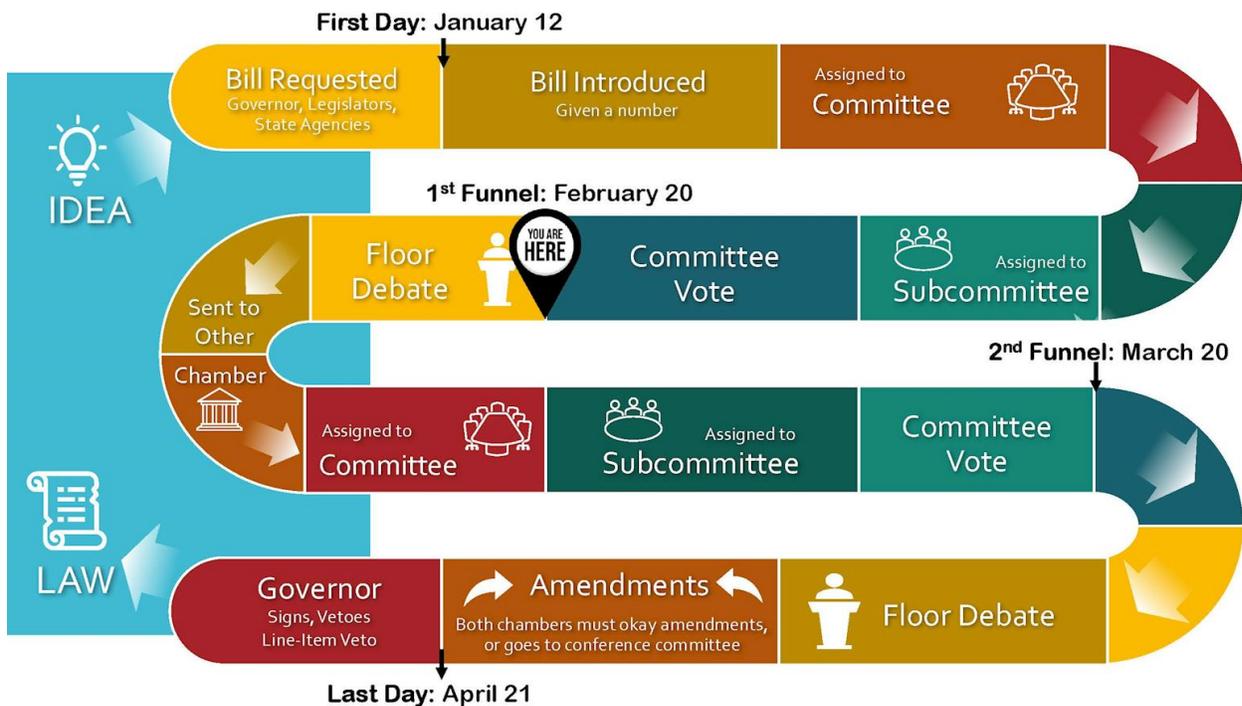
IOWA DD Council

Preparation, Participation, Power

## This Week @ Iowa Capitol | Week 6 | February 20, 2026

### Disability Focused Bills Clear the First Deadline

The Iowa Legislature has now passed its first deadline, what lawmakers call the “first funnel.” This deadline helps narrow the list of bills that can be considered. That is important considering legislators have already introduced **1,542 bills** this year alone. Last year broke the state record for most bills introduced and this may come up a close second.



In order to make this first deadline, bills had to be voted out of their first (originating) committee by Friday, February 20. Bills that are left behind in committee will not become law this year – unless they show up as an amendment to a different bill. There are a couple of exceptions, including bills that are sponsored by the Government Oversight Committee, funding bills (Appropriations Committee), or deal with a tax (Ways & Means Committee).

**NOTE:** We have moved the bills that died in the funnel to the “Inactive” list in the [Bill Tracker](#). Only those bills that made it through this first deadline will still be listed as “Active.”

## Bills Surviving Funnel (Alive)

- [HF 2218](#): Allows **video recordings in special education classrooms**. The bill needs more work since it currently does not comply with federal privacy laws. Parents of children in special education classrooms are on both sides of this issue. It was last week’s [bill of the week](#). Rep. Brooke Boden (R-Warren) is the floor manager.
- [HF 2250](#): Allows Iowa Tuition Grants to be used to help pay for **Comprehensive Transition and Post-secondary (CTP) programs**, which have great success in preparing young adults with disabilities for employment and independent living. Rep. Chad Ingels (R-Fayette), who has two adult children with disabilities, is the floor manager.
- [HF 2476](#): Broadens the current law allowing people to choose to have their autism diagnosis put on their driver’s license. This changes it to a **“non-apparent disability” marking** so it is more inclusive of all intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities, and mental health conditions. Rep. Elizabeth Wilson (D-Linn), who has served on the board of an HCBS provider, is the bill’s sponsor and floor manager.
- [HF 2518](#): Requires regular **Medicaid rate reviews for HCBS providers** and directs Iowa Medicaid to look at border state Medicaid rates as well as other states with a similar population to Iowa. Currently, Medicaid does not review HCBS rates and looks at only Medicare rates when reviewing other rates. Rep. Ann Meyer (R-Webster) is a nurse and is the floor manager.
- [HF 2585](#): Requires pharmacies to provide an **accessible option for prescription labels**, bag tags, and information about medicines. This helps Iowans who are blind or have low vision be able to independently and properly take their medications. Rep. Brett Barker (R-Story) is a

pharmacist and is the floor manager.

- **HSB 696:** Makes it harder for people to get and keep **public assistance programs** by requiring additional information to be submitted to meet work requirements and verify citizenship, including getting food assistance (SNAP and WIC), child care assistance, family investment program, and health care (Medicaid, Iowa Health & Wellness Plan, Hawki). It also requires Iowa Health & Wellness Plan members to be charged copays for dental (\$5), medicines (\$1), and missed appointments (\$5). Embedded in this bill are changes that would increase income eligibility for the Medicaid for Employed Persons with Disabilities (MEPD) program to 300% of the federal poverty level (from 250%), raise reimbursements for HCBS providers that serve rural Iowans with disabilities, and help stabilize rates for young adults aging out of ChildServe. There is a similar bill in the Senate, but it is not the same. You can see a comparison of the bills [here](#). This bill will get a new House File (HF) number next week. Rep. Austin Harris (R-Appanoose) is the floor manager. HSB 696 is this week's [Bill of the Week](#).
- **SF 2087:** Includes **vocational rehabilitation** as a work search activity for unemployment benefits. That means attending these programs fulfills the work search requirement. Sen. Adrian Dickey (R-Jefferson) is the floor manager.
- **SF 2315:** Increases eligibility for the **MEPD Program** to 300% of the federal poverty level (from 250%), exempts pensions (other retirement accounts are already exempted), and allows individuals to pay their MEPD premiums electronically. Sen. Dennis Guth (R-Hancock) is the floor manager.
- **SF 2384 & HSB 598:** Allows **driverless cars** to operate in Iowa. Many Iowans with disabilities see driverless cars as an option to improve transportation in the state, particularly in rural areas. Sen. Scott Webster (R-Scott) and Rep. Devon Wood (R-Taylor) are the floor managers for these bills.
- **SF 2404:** Sets up a pilot program to allow one rural school district and one urban school district to have a **separate school for students enrolled in special education and students with behavioral support needs**. Parents are concerned that this will again “other” their children with special needs. Advocates also argue that this violates the least restrictive setting requirement of federal education law. Sen. Kerry Gruenhagen (R-Scott) is the floor manager.
- **SJR 2012:** Urges Congress to **eliminate the US Department of Education** and give its authority back to the states. Resolutions are not

laws. They only show the Legislature's support or opposition to something. Sen. Lynn Evans (R-Cherokee) is a former school superintendent and is the floor manager.

- **[SSB 3140](#)**: Makes it harder for people to get and keep **public assistance programs** by requiring additional information to be submitted to meet work requirements and verify citizenship, including getting food assistance (SNAP) and health care (Medicaid, Iowa Health & Wellness Plan, Hawki). The bill decreases what is called "retroactive eligibility," which allows a person's services to be paid for after they've been provided. Perhaps the most concerning change is that it locks the state into managed care and states that there can be no change to "fee for service" programs. Many individuals who are on the HIPP program, which saves the Medicaid program funds, question whether this will make it more difficult to make changes to programs like it that save money. You can see a comparison between this bill and the House's public assistance bill [here](#). This bill will get a new Senate File (SF) number next week. Sen. Scott Webster (R-Scott) is the floor manager.
- **[HF 2553](#)**: Creates a pilot program to refurbish and recondition **durable medical equipment (DME)** that will be provided to Medicaid members. Iowa HHS is directed to work with a local affiliate of a national nonprofit to recover DME no longer needed due to death or health status change. The recovered DME would be fixed and given free of charge to those in need. The pilot program would end on July 1, 2030 unless the Legislature takes action to continue it. This bill failed to make it out of the House HHS Committee before the deadline, but leadership reassigned it to the funnel-proof House Appropriations Committee.

**What is a floor manager?** The floor manager is the legislator in charge of the bill. They will lead the debate on it and explain it to their fellow legislators.

**Want to know which bills didn't make the deadline?** You can find all the bills that failed to make it out of committee before Friday's deadline by switching to the "Inactive" list in the Bill Tracker. To do that, go to the [Bill Tracker](#) (the list shows active bills by default). Go to the box marked "Active" and select "Inactive" from the dropdown list. Press the "Search Bills" button.

## The LET US WORK Campaign is Working!

Last week, the Senate HHS Committee passed a bill that addresses income limits for those in the Medicaid for Employed Persons with Disabilities (MEPD) program. This is part of what "Work Without Worry" would have changed. Last week we reported on the deep disappointment disability advocates felt when a House committee passed a bill that put small changes

to the MEPD program into a bill that will make it harder for some lowans to access food and health care.

After hearing from dozens of disability advocates, Senator Dennis Guth (R-Hancock) quickly filed a “clean” bill to make the MEPD changes without the additional program cuts. Within a day, Sen. Guth held a subcommittee. On the second day, he and the Senate HHS Committee Chair were contacted by several advocates because it looked like the bill was going to miss the funnel. Senator Guth quickly persuaded the leaders to add the bill to the committee’s agenda that same morning. It passed unanimously out of committee and is now safe from the funnel and ready for full Senate debate.

**How does this happen?** Working hard and working together! Senate committee members repeatedly mentioned the number of people showing up to the Capitol with stickers (Let Us Work!) and advocating for change. They noted how many people came to subcommittee meetings. Dozens of you have stepped up to advocate from home and at the Capitol, including Zach Mecham and Alex Watters. They have spent days at the Capitol and hundreds more hours at home and on the road pushing for this, and their work (and the work of so many more of you) has paid off. **Consider this a win!**

[Senate File 2315](#) allows individuals making up to 300% of the federal poverty level to participate in the MEPD program. The current income cap for this program is 250% of the federal poverty level. The bill also exempts pensions from asset limits (other retirement accounts are already exempted from assets). Finally, the bill also allows a person to pay their MEPD premiums electronically.

During the subcommittee hearing, several advocates spoke in support of the bill, which they see as a way to start eliminating the “poverty trap” that many working lowans with disabilities fall into. Some of the comments made at the subcommittee:

- **Zach Mecham** asked Senators to consider a phased-in approach that gradually steps up the income eligibility. Mecham said it is a “meaningful step in the right direction.” He asked for a stepped approach to raising eligibility. He also said marriage should not be discouraged and asked that spousal income be exempted from income calculations.
- **Alex Watters** said he can’t advance his career in Iowa because of these limits, but could if he moved a few miles over the border to Minnesota. “Other states have completely eliminated the asset limits and have not seen the costs that this chamber is worried about,” said Watters. “Gradually increasing income eligibility limits would set up guardrails so you are monitoring the cost to the state.”

- **Kate Walton's brother Jay** is blind and lives independently. He works, lives on his own, and is in the MEPD program. Walton said her brother pays all of his own bills, except his MEPD premium. Because the program only accepts mailed-in checks, Jay sends his family the money electronically so they can write out a check for his monthly premium and take it to the post office. She encouraged legislators to make the electronic payment option available so he can fully realize his independence.
- **Carlyn Crowe**, the Iowa DD Council's Public Policy Manager, acknowledged that it is hard to determine future savings. "Growth in the program will be from people coming from Medicaid and coming off other assistance programs," said Crowe. She pointed out that costs will be shifted rather than increased. Instead of paying for services on Medicaid, people would first access their employer health plans and Medicaid would kick in for services that private insurance does not cover. In addition, people would be paying a share of these costs through their premiums.
- **Another advocate named Erica** talked about the irony that vocational rehabilitation is good at getting people back to work, but then you go back to work, and you are limited by asset and income limits. Erica is a C5 quadriplegic who works for a non-profit education organization. As an accountant, she said numbers matter. Since she got a raise and lost her Medicaid coverage, she has had to pay \$35,000/year for services that allow her to get to work every day. She said that is just the cost for home health services. She said that if income and asset limits were lifted, she would happily pay a premium. "I would be able to buy a house, not drain my savings and IRA," she said. She said to imagine two people in an office working next to each other, doing the same job and making the same money. One has to pay \$35,000 out of their own paycheck just to have the help to get to work every day – the other does not.
- **Catherine Pollard**, who represents the Easters Seals summed it up best, "There is dignity in work...and we think this legislation will be good for employers as well as people with disabilities."

Iowa HHS has not yet come up with its cost estimate, but legislators know it is coming.

- **Sen. Sarah Trone Garriott (D-Dallas)** said she knows a good bill when she sees a very long and diverse list of organizations who all support the bill. "Every single person listed is in support," she said. "The Medicaid program is standing in the way of people who want to work. This is the only Medicaid work reform our state should be working on this year."

- **Sen. Dennis Guth (R-Hancock)**, the bill’s sponsor and the subcommittee chair, recalled going to work with a constituent with a disability in Clear Lake. He said everyone – customers, bosses, coworkers – were so pleased to have them working with them. He said that this is something that needs to move forward, and he’s willing to look at amendments to improve the bill.

The bill may be sent to the Senate Appropriations Committee since it will have a budget impact. While this is a huge success, now is not the time to sit back and celebrate. There is a long way to go and money is tight this year, so it will take everyone’s advocacy to get this across the finish line.

## What Can You DO?

1. **Watch the end of the Senate HHS committee's February 19th meeting.** Senator Guth gave credit to Zach Mecham for his advocacy. It will inspire you to keep advocating. [You can watch it here.](#)
2. **Keep advocating!** This year’s bills are a step in the right direction but don’t come close to getting rid of the barriers that “Work Without Worry” would have changed. Tell your legislators that “We still have to worry! These bills are a step in the right direction and will affect a few people. But we will not see a big impact until lowans with disabilities don’t have to worry about losing Medicaid because **we want to work** and save money. **Let us Work!**”

## Looking Ahead

Legislators will spend most of their days in debate. The next deadline is only a month away. By March 20, a bill must have passed either the House or Senate, then be voted out of committee in the opposite chamber. So that means House Files must be voted out of Senate Committees, and Senate Files out of House Committees. That’s a lot of work, and it all starts with getting a vote by the full House or Senate.

- You can see the list of bills to be debated each day in the House [here](#) and the Senate [here](#).
- You can watch or listen to debate two ways – live or recorded. Both can be accessed from the legislative homepage: [legis.iowa.gov](http://legis.iowa.gov).
- If you missed the debate on a specific bill, you can find the video [here](#). Just type in the bill number (HF# or SF#) under “name” and hit enter. Once the bill is shown, the left column will have the video archive links under “related information.”

In next week's report, we'll do a deeper dive into the public assistance bills, but you can see the difference between the two [here](#).

**Find all the bills** we are tracking at:  
[iowaddcouncil.org/bill-tracker](http://iowaddcouncil.org/bill-tracker)

**Take action on bills** by emailing your legislators at:  
[iowaddcouncil.org/take-action-center](http://iowaddcouncil.org/take-action-center)

**Find local legislative town hall meetings** in our calendar  
at: [iowaddcouncil.org/calendar](http://iowaddcouncil.org/calendar)

**Find our bills of the week at:**  
[iowaddcouncil.org/bill-of-the-week](http://iowaddcouncil.org/bill-of-the-week)