



NEW YEAR WELCOMES NEW LEGISLATORS

Iowa's 150 elected legislators returned to the Iowa Capitol on Monday, January 12 to begin their 100-day legislative session. Iowa broke records in 2025 for the most special elections in a year:

- **Sen. Mike Zimmer (D-Clinton)** replaced Chris Cournoyer, who resigned in January 2025 to become Lt. Governor.
- **Rep. Angel Ramirez (D-Linn)** replaced Sami Scheetz in April 2025 after he became a Linn County Supervisor.
- **Sen. Catelin Drey (D-Woodbury)** replaced Rocky DeWitt, who died of cancer last summer.
- **Rep. Wendy Larson (R-Calhoun)** replaced Mike Sexton (who is now working in the Trump Administration) in December.
- **Sen. Renee Hardman (D-West Des Moines)** won a late December special election to replace Claire Celsi, who died unexpectedly last fall.

Since the last session, the House and Senate also elected new leaders.

- **Rep. Bobby Kaufmann (R-Cedar)** became the new House Majority Leader, taking over for Rep. Matt Windschitl (R-Harrison). Rep. Windschitl is still a legislator, but he is now running for Congress in Iowa's 4th district.
- **Rep. Brian Meyer (D-Polk)** became the new House Minority Leader, taking over for Rep. Jennifer Konfrst (D-Polk). Rep. Konfrst also continues to serve as a legislator while running for Congress in Iowa's 3rd district.
- **Sen. Mike Klimesh (R-Winneshiek)** is now the Senate Majority Leader, taking over for Sen. Jack Whitver (R-Polk). Sen. Whitver is retiring after this year to focus on his health and recovery from brain cancer.

Along with these new legislators and leaders comes changes in committee memberships. Check out the updated Legislative Guide to learn more about these new legislators, and view new committee assignments (www.iowaddcouncil.org/who-represents-you).



Carlyn's Corner

Have you heard about the **Let Us Work campaign** and not sure what to do? Well let's get to work! Let Us Work is a campaign to mobilize Iowans to make a difference for people with disabilities. **Mobilize means – GET YOU TO ACT!**

We want you to contact your legislators about getting rid of barriers to employment for people with disabilities. In other words — we want to help more people with disabilities work, work more hours and earn more money. The Let Us Work campaign kicked off with a fall Blitz. The blitz encouraged everyone to contact their legislators before the legislative session. Legislative session always starts in January.

NOW, the Let Us Work Campaign is our Capitol Blitz! We are encouraging advocates, the disability community and Iowans to COME TO THE CAPITOL to show your support for getting rid of barriers to employment for people with disabilities. We want to help you and your family and friends get to the Capitol during the legislative session. When there are people at the Capitol EVERY DAY working for people with disabilities it makes a difference!

Can you help people with disabilities by coming to the Capitol during February and March? Here's how you can make difference for people with disabilities:

1. Make plans for a day that you can come to the Capitol for at least two hours.
2. You can organize through an organization or come on your own—and bring a friend or two.
3. Sign up here for a day that works for you: www.signupgenius.com/go/10C044FA8A722A6FEC61-61087011-letuswork#/ . If you need help with transportation, you can let us know through this link.
4. We will do a mini-training online to help you get ready for your day. Before you come we will tell you how to let your legislators know you will be at the Capitol.
5. Show up and make a difference! You can also use our Take Action Center (iowaddcouncil.org/take-action-center) to send a message to your legislator about this campaign - we've got the message already written for you!

Let's get to work!



LET US WORK!

A campaign to give people with disabilities the freedom to work.

Legislative Leaders Lay Out Priorities for the Year

As the Iowa Legislature reconvened for the 2026 session on January 12, 2026, legislative leaders used their opening-day speeches to stress cooperation and outline major priorities for the coming months, from property tax reform to public safety and landowner rights.

Speaking in the Senate chamber, **Senate President Amy Sinclair (R-Wayne)** set a tone of civility and mutual respect. “I encourage each of us to tone down our rhetoric and to get to work on what Iowans are telling us they really want,” she said, urging colleagues to avoid dehumanizing language in political debate. Sinclair noted a broader trend she sees in the political climate: “When people disagree, it has become disagreeable... Calling people fascists, scum, deplorables, bigots... cannot be embraced as a status quo here.”

Senate Majority Leader Mike Klimesh (R-Winneshiek) previewed his agenda, including legislation to address property tax reform. “Over the next 100 days we will be addressing property tax reform to help bring relief to Iowans who have decided to build their lives, grow their families, and dedicate their careers to our state,” Klimesh said. He also emphasized a need to address landowner rights when it comes to pipeline projects and bring down the cost of energy.

Senate Minority Leader Janice Weiner (D-Johnson) also appealed for empathy and unity, linking national concerns to state governance. “We Iowans... stand up for the rights that are our rights too... let us resolve to carry out the people’s business with civility and empathy,” she said, referencing recent national events that have shaken communities. She also focused her comments on the cost of living, “It’s time to listen to the working Iowans who power this state, who are telling us...that their core issue is affordability,” she emphasized.

In the House, **Speaker of the House Pat Grassley (R-Grundy)** highlighted key Republican priorities for the session, particularly public safety. “This legislative session, career criminals will get the

message: they are not welcome here in Iowa,” he said, outlining a “tough on crime agenda” with stricter measures for repeat violent offenders. Grassley also reiterated Republicans’ focus on property tax reform, saying Iowa’s system needs to “put the taxpayers first.”

House Minority Leader Brian Meyer (D-Polk) hit on affordability in his message as well, saying “Iowa House Democrats will be committed to one clear goal this session: fighting for every Iowan who’s been left behind after nearly a decade of one-party control. Our agenda is rooted in what we hear every day from families across this state, and it comes down to three pillars: public education, affordability, and quality of life.”

You can read and watch the opening day Senate and House speeches:

- Watch Senate speeches at: bit.ly/4jMyhQK
- Watch House speeches at: bit.ly/45nPo5E
- Read Senate speeches at: bit.ly/4b5hj4n
- Read House speeches at: bit.ly/3YL8n6x

Join Us for our biweekly virtual CAPITOL CHATS

January 23 (Noon-12:30 pm)

February 6 (Noon-12:30 pm)

February 20 (Noon-12:30 pm)

March 6 (Noon-12:30 pm)

March 20 (Noon-12:30 pm)

April 3 (Noon-12:30 pm)

April 17 (Noon-12:30 pm)

Sign Up and Watch Recorded Chats at:
iowaddcouncil.org/capitol-chat

Governor Reynolds Priorities for 2026

Every year, the Governor presents her top priorities to the Iowa Legislature during her [Condition of the State](#) address. This year her focus is on helping veterans, slowing the growth of property taxes, improving rural health care, and addressing Iowa's sky-high cancer rates. Some priorities include:

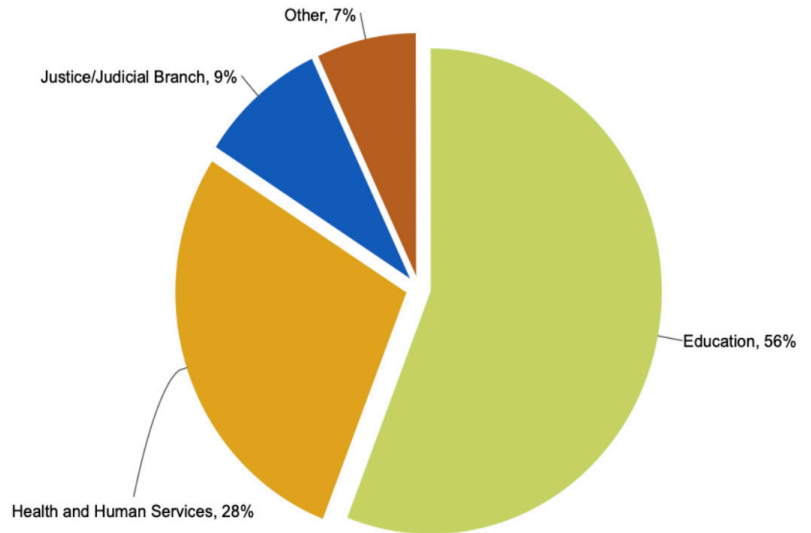
- **No longer requiring counties to elect their County Auditor** (who controls elections), **County Recorder** (who maintains official records and handles licensing), and **County Treasurer** (who collects taxes and manages other fee-based services). Under the Governor's proposal, the county board of supervisors could appoint these positions.
- Creating a \$10 million grant fund to **help local governments share services**.
- **Reconsidering a state-based health insurance exchange** (where people are able to purchase Affordable Care Act insurance plans). Right now Iowans go through a national exchange; the creation of an Iowa-based exchange may make it easier for Iowans to find low-cost health insurance options.
- **Requiring every person registering to vote to swear to they are a US citizen**, and increasing the penalty for lying about citizenship. The Governor also recommends requiring all state agencies to use the federal citizenship verification system (E-Verify) to make sure employees are legally able to work in the country.

The Governor's budget puts additional money into Medicaid, but those funds are needed to meet current responsibilities. That means there is no money set aside for provider rate increases or to fully implement the HOME project (waiver redesign).

In fact, the Governor is proposing **\$52 million in Medicaid "cost containment."** That usually means more hurdles for Medicaid members and providers to go through before receiving services and payment for the services. It often means fewer services, less hours of coverage, or lower pay.

Watch @infonetowa and @iowaddcouncil social media platforms and the ["Latest News"](#) section of the website.

Below you can see how much of our state's budget goes to education & health/human services.



Other budget recommendations include:

- Moving grants for **Centers for Independent Living Centers** and funding for **independent living services** from Vocational Rehabilitation to Iowa HHS' Aging and Disability Services Division. The Entrepreneurs with Disabilities program remains with vocational rehabilitation.
- Moving funding for **Iowa ABLE** administration from Iowa HHS to the State Treasurer, where the program is managed.
- **Increasing school aid by 2%.** This year parents of any income level can access the educational savings account (ESA) program that allows tax dollars that would have gone to their local public school to be used to pay for private school tuition. The total going into these ESAs in the next year is expected to be \$349.7 million, an increase of \$20 million over last year and \$132 million more than the year before that. No change in funding for paraeducator salaries (\$14 million) and special education (\$10 million).
- Cutting funding for **school-based mental health training** by \$1.5 million (leaving \$1.9 million). The Governor stated this is "duplicative" funding.

Legislators Introduce Hundreds of Bills in First Week

Legislators filed **296 bills** during their first week back to work at the State Capitol. The Iowa DD Council will be spotlighting some of these bills in their 2026 “Bills of the Week.” You can find the bills of the week at iowaddcouncil.org/bill-of-the-week, along with talking points advocates can use when talking about these bills with their legislators. Here are a few of the new bills introduced:

- **House File 2033** requires pharmacies give patients the option of receiving their medications with accessible prescription labels, bag tags, and medical guides at no additional cost. The goal of this bill is to help people with disabilities and people with low vision be able to understand and use their medications safely.
- **House File 2003** sets up a pilot program to allow one rural and one urban school district to set up a separate school for children with behavioral conditions and children eligible for special education. This is a concerning bill, since the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) requires students with disabilities to receive a “Free and Appropriate Public Education” (often referred to as “FAPE”) and that this be delivered in the least restrictive environment. This law makes sure that children with disabilities are served in an integrated setting, with their friends without disabilities.
- **House File 2012** makes students with disabilities attending Comprehensive Transition & Post Secondary Programs (CTPs) eligible for Iowa tuition grants. This change makes programs like REACH (University of Iowa), NEXT (Northwestern University), and EDUCATE (North Iowa Area Community College) more affordable.
- **House File 2017** creates an Iowa Work Opportunity Tax Credit to replace the one Congress let expire last year. This encourages businesses to hire individuals with disabilities and others who face challenges in finding jobs. The subcommittee met on Tuesday, January 20 and approved the bill - and this is **our first Bill of the Week for 2026!**
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- **House File 2068 & Senate File 2015** allows political parties to put the location of caucuses on their social media platforms, instead of publishing them in the newspaper. This means they could put this information out only on social media - and not in the newspaper or on their website. This could make it harder for Iowans to find where their local precinct caucus is held, particularly those that may not use social media.
- **House File 2094** doubles the number of beds at the state’s Mental Health Institutions and allows Medicaid funds to be used to pay for those services. Advocates say that more inpatient beds may be needed, but the real problem is the lack of subacute beds (a step-down level of care that helps people transition from an institutional setting to community living). Allowing Medicaid to pay for MHI beds would save the state a significant amount of money, but advocates say that those savings should be reinvested into HCBS provider rates and the development of subacute options, rather than investing in the most expensive level of care.
- **Senate Study Bill 3005** allows individuals with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, or traumatic brain injury to meet unemployment assistance work search requirements by participating in approved rehabilitative support programs through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. This change is intended to make unemployment benefits more accessible to persons with disabilities by recognizing their unique employment support needs.

For more information on these and other bills the Iowa DD Council is tracking, www.iowaddcouncil.org/bill-tracker.

HOME Project Public Comment

Iowa HHS is now taking public comments on their Hope & Opportunity in Many Environments (HOME) project. This will change Iowa’s home & community based services (HCBS) waivers, creating a single disability waiver for adults and another one for children. **You have until February 13, 2026 to comment on this change.**

To comment or read more about this: hhs.iowa.gov/medicaid/about-medicaid/medicaid-projects/home/public-comment-information.

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