CIVIL RIGHTS
PARTNERSHIP
EMPOWERMENT
ACCESS
SAFETY
COMMUNITY
LIVED EXPERIENCES
DIGNITY

CHANGE

Public Policy Agenda 2026

Advocates for justice. Advances human and legal rights. Protects Iowans with disabilities.

Introduction and Purpose
Disability Rights Iowa's
Policy Advocacy

Iowans with disabilities are entitled to equal opportunities and to fully participate in everyday community life. Disability Rights Iowa's (DRI) vision of change reflects this – **DRI strives for a changed world where people with disabilities are valued and fully included in their communities, their workplaces, and their schools, where they have equitable access to all opportunities, and make their own decisions.**

DRI's Policy Advocacy works to advance our vision through educating policymakers on the impact of policy decisions on people with disabilities and seeks to broaden policymakers' understanding on disability and accessibility. Through our public policy advocacy and education, DRI anticipates that Iowa policymakers will proactively consider the impact of proposed policies on Iowa's Disability Community.

DRI's Policy Agenda
91st Iowa General Assembly

DRI's 2026 Policy Priorities include researching and analyzing legislative activities, and/or other policies that impact Iowans with disabilities in four significant policy areas. In FY 26, DRI will direct our policy advocacy on proposed legislation that impacts Iowans with disabilities in employment, voting, special education, and Home and Community Based Services.

Disability Rights Iowa classifies proposed legislation that impacts one of these four key areas into either High Impact, Medium Impact or Tracking Impact. Disability Rights Iowa may address "High Impact' bills with DRI written and/or in-person summary of the impact of that bill on Iowa's Disability Community, personal contacts, and education on the impact of the proposed bill. DRI may address Medium Impact bills with letters, often in conjunction with other disability partners. Bills DRI classifies as Tracking Impact., will be closely followed but DRI will generally not take action or a position on these bills.

Visit our 2026 Policy Advocate page to view our High, Medium and Tracking Impact Bills. Public Policy Agenda, legislative comments, testimony, public reports, comments on proposed bills and/or policies, letters, and other legislative information. Copies of DRI's public comments, as well as position statements on selected disability related issues, can be found at https://disabilityrightsiowa.org/what-we-do/policy-advocacy/.

Employment

Many Iowans with disabilities seek competitive employment. However, 16% of Iowans with disabilities are unemployed[1] and about 48.8% work only part-time[2]. The median earning for Iowans with disabilities is $25,938 compared to Iowans without disabilities median earning of $40,308[3]. Engaging in competitive employment is the key to Iowans with disabilities achieving self-sufficiency and independence, full access, and equal opportunity.

Employment is one of DRI's FY 2026 Agency Areas of Focus. DRI seeks to ensure that individuals with disabilities understand their rights to competitive employment, and to request reasonable workplace accommodations. DRI also assists individuals with disabilities in using employment services that support competitive employment. DRI will educate policymakers on proposed legislation related to the impact of competitive employment in Iowa, and/or proposed legislation that creates barriers to competitive inclusive employment.

Disability Rights Iowa's employment policy focus:

- Will educate policymakers on the impact of making competitive integrated employment the only option for publicly funded employment services for Iowans with disabilities.
- Will educate policymakers on the impact of implementing Employment First values that ensure Iowans with disabilities are paid minimum wage or higher.
- Will educate policymakers on the importance of ensuring Governor Reynolds' initiative to increase Iowa's workforce programs for targeted populations includes Iowans with disabilities as a specific target population.

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[1] *Iowa*. Disability Employment TA Center. (2022, December 6) https://aoddisabilityemploymenttacenter.com/state/iowa/

[2] THE STATE LIBRARY OF IOWA & THE OFFICE OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. (2024, July). *Iowans with Disabilities: 2024*. State Data Center. https://www.iowadatacenter.org/application/files/4217/2054/2826/IowanswithDisabilities2024.pdf

[3] I.d.

Voting

Ensuring voting is fully accessible for Iowans with disabilities is one of DRI's FY 2026 Agency Areas of Focus. A 2021 Rutgers study found that one in nine voters in the disability community encounter barriers while voting. This is almost double the rate of barriers voters without disabilities experienced. DRI will provide education on the impact of proposed legislation that creates barriers for individuals with disabilities in voting including accessibility challenges.

Disability Rights Iowa's voting policy focus:

- Provide education on the impact of lengthening early voting options.
- Provide education on the need to create additional and accessible voting places.
- Provide education on the impact of expanding number of days to receive and return an absentee ballot.
- Provide education on the impact of providing assistance to deliver an absentee ballot.
- Provide education on the impact of providing ballots in plain language.

Home and Community Based Services (HCBS)

The purpose of HCBS services are to provide community supports and services so that individuals with disabilities can reside independently in their communities. Ensuring that Iowans with disabilities live in their community of choice and receive necessary Home and Community Based Medicaid services and supports is one of DRI's FY2026 Areas of Focus.

Community Integration means Iowans with disabilities make independent decisions regarding where to live, how to receive their services, and are fully included in their community. Selecting where to live and where to receive necessary HCBS services and supports is one of the most impactful decisions Iowans with disabilities make regarding their independence. DRI will educate policymakers on the impact of proposed legislation and/or impact of current trends/issues that impact the ability of Iowans with disabilities to live in the community of their choice with necessary HCBS services and supports.

Disability Rights Iowa's HCBS policy focus:

- Educate policymakers on the impact of the HCBS Final Settings Rule.
- Educate policymakers on the importance of incorporating elements of Final Settings Rule into Iowa Administrative Code.
- Educate policymakers on the impact of involuntary discharge of Iowans with disabilities from HCBS services, supports, settings.
- Educate policymakers on the impact of education of proposed legislation or policy that may impact HCBS services.

Special Education

Special education is one of DRI's FY 2026 Agency Areas of Focus. DRI seeks to ensure that K-12 students with disabilities remain in school and progress in the curriculum. DRI will educate lawmakers on the impact of bills related to the removal of students with disabilities from the K-12 classroom, the benefits of graduating from high school, and the positive outcomes that are possible from attending postsecondary programs.

Disability Rights Iowa's special education policy focus:

- Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) outline the educational services and supports crucial to student success. DRI will educate policymakers on the importance of ensuring schools develop and include appropriate positive behavioral intervention goals in students' IEPs to keep students in their classroom. Appropriate positive behavioral intervention plans will also identify how to avoid use of restraints, seclusion, and permanent removal from an inclusive classroom setting.
- In partnership with the Developmental Disabilities Council and other key stakeholders, DRI will educate policymakers on the impact of supporting and investing in opportunities for Iowa students with developmental disabilities to attend comprehensive programs helping students move through graduation and postsecondary programs that develop their skills for independent, community-based living, as well as opportunities to pursue higher education, and avoid unnecessary placement in restrictive or institutional settings.

Disability Rights Iowa

Creating Change

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