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magazine



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January 2021

ISAC Legislative Priorities

ISAC Illustrated Essay Contest

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# The Iowa County

January 2021 \* Volume 50, Number 1

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<b>FEATURE - ISAC Legislative Priorities</b>	<b>11-16</b>
Mental Health and Disability Services Jenny Stewart, Suzanne Watson, Molly Brown	4-6
Home Rule Lucas Beenken	5-7
Emergency Medical Services Jamie Cashman	8
Wright County EMS as an Essential Service Karl Helgevold	9
ISAC Illustrated Essay Contest Rachel Bennett	17
ISAC Preferred Vendor Spotlights IPAIT - Iowa Public Agency Investment Trust Neapolitan Labs	18 19
<b>Calendar of Events</b>	<b>21</b>



#### **ISAC's Mission:**

To promote effective and responsible county government  
for the people of Iowa.

#### **ISAC's Vision:**

To be the principal, authoritative source of representation,  
information and services for and about county government  
in Iowa.

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# Feature - ISAC Legislative Priorities

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## County Mobile Crisis

### Background

Since the implementation of the Mental Health and Disability Services (MH/DS) Region system on July 1, 2014, regions have been working diligently to either build from scratch or expand existing county crisis services systems to all counties in Iowa. Emphasizing “no-wrong-door” access to a continuum of care, crisis services systems connect individuals experiencing a mental health crisis with the appropriate level of care and support services in the community, while simultaneously diverting them from unnecessary emergency department visits, hospitalizations, or periods of incarceration in local jails.

Mobile Crisis Response is one type of crisis service implemented in counties throughout the state to facilitate access to care. In *National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care—A Best Practices Toolkit*, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) identifies Mobile Crisis Response as an “essential element within a no-wrong-door integrated crisis system” (p. 12). With the passage of HF 2456 into law in 2018, implementation of Mobile Crisis Response, and other crisis services, as a component of Access Centers became a legislative mandate.

According to Iowa Administrative Code 441—24.36(225C), Mobile Crisis Response is an “on-site, in-person intervention for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. Mobile Crisis Response staff provide crisis response services in the individual’s home or at other locations in the community.” On-site services may include assessing individuals in crisis for intention to harm themselves or others, developing a safety plan with individuals if appropriate, stabilizing or de-escalating the crisis on site if possible, transporting individuals to the appropriate level of care if stabilization in the community is not possible, and connecting individuals with supports and services to prevent future crises.

### Access

Understanding how Mobile Crisis Response operates across the state of Iowa can be challenging. As this article goes to press, Mobile Crisis Response services are available in 75 Iowa counties, financially supported by 13 MH/DS regions, and provided by 14 service providers. In most regions, a single service provider delivers Mobile Crisis Response Services to all counties; however, in three MH/DS regions multiple service providers deliver Mobile Crisis Response Services to different counties within the region.

Although the services provided on-site to individuals in crisis are generally similar, the method used to access Mobile Crisis Response is a significant point of differentiation among programs. Access to Mobile Crisis Response occurs through one of two approaches: dispatch through law enforcement and other agencies/institutions, or dispatch through crisis counselors. In five regions (21 counties), Mobile Crisis Response teams are dispatched to the location of an individual in crisis through a request from law enforcement. In three counties (Dallas, Polk, and Pottawattamie), Mobile Crisis Response was implemented as a component of Alternatives to Incarceration Initiatives that predated the formation of the MH/DS region system. When the regions formed, the service was expanded to additional counties within the region maintaining dispatch through law enforcement. In some counties using this approach, Mobile Crisis Response also responds to requests for service from other institutions such as hospitals, medical clinics, jails, and schools.



*pictured left to right*

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# Feature - ISAC Legislative Priorities

In eight regions (54 counties), counselors operating crisis call lines dispatch Mobile Crisis Response to the location of an individual in crisis. Under this approach, anyone can call the crisis line and request Mobile Crisis Response services. When this occurs, crisis counselors screen the situation for safety before dispatching a one or two-person team to the location of the individual in crisis. The defining feature of this approach is that anyone in the community is able to call and request services. This includes law enforcement officers, as well as other institutions such as schools or hospitals.

## Mobile Crisis Response in Southwest Iowa

In the Southwest Iowa MH/DS region, Heartland Family Service provides Mobile Crisis Response services throughout our nine county region. The Mental Health Crisis Response Team (MHCRT), made up of licensed mental health practitioners, responds to requests from law enforcement, jails, pre-committal screenings, court orders, and hospitals.

Mobile Crisis Response assessments result from requests made by law enforcement officers. In FY 2020, MHCRT completed 97 law enforcement-initiated assessments. MHCRT assessments in jails began in Pottawattamie County in December 2010. The service was made available to all jails in the region during the second half of FY 2016. MHCRT completed 55 jail-initiated assessments in FY 2020.

Pre-committal assessments occur when citizens who are considering filing civil commitment paperwork are provided with information about the service at the courthouse and contact the MHCRT to request an assessment. The purpose of the assessment is to determine the appropriate level of care in an attempt to avoid unnecessary civil commitments. In FY 2020, MHCRT completed 25 pre-committal assessments.

Court-ordered assessments occur when a judge is concerned that a civil commitment may not be the appropriate course of action in cases brought before them. MHCRT completed 27 court ordered assessments in FY 2020.

During the last quarter of FY 2018, the Region and MHCRT piloted telehealth MHCRT assessments in the emergency department of one rural critical access hospital. Since that time, hospital-based assessments have expanded to four additional hospitals. There were 132 assessments completed in four hospital emergency departments in FY 2020. This service continues to expand to additional hospitals during the current fiscal year.

Of the 336 individuals assessed by the MHCRT during FY 2020, the recommended disposition in 79% of cases overall involved the individual not requiring civil commitment. The percentage assessments in which commitment was not recommended varied by assessment source as the graphics below indicate.





# Feature - ISAC Legislative Priorities

## Mobile Crisis Response Across Iowa

### ABOUT MOBILE CRISIS RESPONSE

#### WHAT IS IT?

Iowa Department of Human Services defines Mobile Crisis Response (MCR) as...

*"an on-site, face-to-face mental health service for individuals experiencing a crisis. [MCR] services are provided in the individual's home or at any other location where the individual lives, works, attends school or socializes. Mobile response staff are able to intervene wherever the crisis is occurring."*

#### HOW IS IT ACCESSED?

- In some areas of the state anyone can call to access mobile crisis outreach including individuals, family members, concerned citizens, and law enforcement
- In other areas mobile crisis response can only be dispatched by law enforcement or accessed through the local emergency department or school.

#### DOES IT WORK?

**Diversion from high acuity services:**

**85%**

Diverted from jail & hospital Jan-Aug 2020 in the **CROSS REGION**

**82%**

Of all crisis calls were resolved in the community in Aug. 2020 in the **EASTERN IOWA REGION**

**80%**

Diverted from civil commitment, jail & hospital in FY20 in the **SWIA REGION**

**Quick response to individuals in crisis:**

**6**

**Minutes**

Avg response time in rural **SWIA** counties via telehealth

**55**

**Minutes**

Average response time last year in the **CICS REGION**

**60**

**Minutes**

MCR responded within 60 minutes in 93% of cases in **CROSS REGION**

#### WHAT IS THE COMMUNITY SAYING?

*"Coming from a law enforcement office, having this service available to us and our community is valuable, important and needed. I am glad that we have this resource available to us. It makes my job easier and it benefits our community immensely."*

-Testimonial from Regions in Northwest Iowa served by Seasons Center

### SERVICE AVAILABILITY MAP & PROVIDERS



### SUCCESS STORY

In a recent successful intervention in rural Southwest Iowa, mobile crisis response (MCR) assisted local police with an individual in crisis. A concerned friend notified the local police department (PD) of an individual making remarks that were alarming. The concerned friend thought the individual might be suicidal. The friend reported that the individual was abusing alcohol, was recently laid off from their job and was recently separated from their spouse. The officer determined that the situation was appropriate and called MCR.

A licensed mental health therapist answered the call and took the report from the officer regarding the background of the case. The therapist received verbal consent from the individual to perform a brief (30-40 min) mental health/substance abuse telehealth assessment through a secure IPAD provided to the PD through Southwest Iowa MHDS Region. The therapist determined the individual did not need hospitalization and developed a safety plan with the individual. At the 30-day follow up, the therapist was happy to report the individual was engaged in treatment, doing well and had no further incidents with the police.

# Feature - ISAC Legislative Priorities

## Home Rule

Iowa's first two counties were created in 1834. When Iowa became a state in 1846 that number had grown to 44, and when the present state constitution was adopted in 1857 there were 99 counties. It wasn't until 1897 that the General Assembly set the structure and duties of county government.

Prior to 1978 Iowa operated under Dillon's Rule; a doctrine that expresses that local governments derive their powers and rights from the state government. With this tenet, the powers of Iowa counties, and in fact counties and cities nationwide, were narrowly construed to only include those powers expressly granted or clearly implied by state law. As a quick aside, Dillon's Rule is named after John Forrest Dillon who served as Scott County Attorney, Iowa District Court Judge, Iowa Supreme Court Justice, and United States Circuit Court Judge. While on the federal bench, Dillon wrote *Municipal Corporations*, which became the basis for Dillon's Rule and was cited by the Supreme Court of the United States in its ruling in *Hunter v. Pittsburgh*, which effectively made state sovereignty over municipalities the law of the land. However, the ruling did not prevent a state from granting home rule authority to local governments through legislation or constitutional amendments.



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During the 66<sup>th</sup> and 67<sup>th</sup> General Assemblies the Iowa Legislature adopted the County Home Rule Amendment to the Iowa Constitution, and it was approved by the voters on November 7, 1978. The exact language can be found in Article III, Section 39A of the Iowa Constitution. The amendment essentially moved Iowa away from a system where counties could only do what the state explicitly allowed, to a system where counties can act in an area not specifically prohibited by state law. There are limitations, however. Counties can only act on local and not state affairs, regulations within city limits cannot conflict with city regulations, regulations cannot be less stringent than state law, and counties cannot levy a tax unless it is authorized by Iowa Code. Chapter 331 of the Iowa Code lays out county home rule implementation, authority, responsibilities, and limitations. Of course, many other code sections touch on these items as well.

The Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC) has a standing policy statement in its legislative package expressing support for home rule authority and local control. It reads in part:

*County officials seek to preserve local decision-making authority and oppose tax limitations, unfunded state mandates, state-mandated reorganization measures, or other state initiatives that limit a county's ability (and therefore its citizens' ability) to make spending, service, and governance decisions at the local level. ISAC reaffirms its commitment to the concept of local control over local governance issues.*

Over the years, perhaps since its original implementation, county home rule has faced legislative proposals that would circumvent local control. Whether its pre-emption, changing state law (or attempting to) to put county regulations in conflict, placing limitations on revenue generation, or attempting to exert authority over what should be local decision-making. Some examples from just the last several years include:

- A pre-emption bill that prohibited counties from raising the minimum wage or regulating certain consumer goods.
- A fireworks bill that prohibited counties from controlling the sale within their jurisdiction.
- A weapons bill that affected courthouse control and put in place unfunded mandates.
- A "sanctuary" bill that could put the state required actions of sheriffs in conflict with the U.S. Constitution.
- Multiple transportation bills including raising weight limits on secondary roads or imposing new requirements, when secondary roads and bridges should be under the authority of the county and the system is not designed for higher and higher weight limits.

Continues on page 8.

# Feature - ISAC Legislative Priorities

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## Emergency Medical Services

Traveling the state, we have heard time and time again from county supervisors of the need to provide a stable funding mechanism for Emergency Medical Services (EMS). This has quickly become one of the top issues facing counties in Iowa, and for the first time, is an ISAC Legislative Top Priority.

EMS in many Iowa counties are insufficient due to a lack of a stable funding mechanism. This leads to the absence of vital services in times of critical need in rural areas. ISAC recommends the passage of legislation that would allow boards of supervisors to declare EMA an Essential Service and put in place an ad valorem property tax to fund the operations. We want to make clear that this would not be a mandate. Giving each county this option would provide better EMS coverage and adequate funding in the unincorporated areas. This funding solution has been successful in Iowa. Please read Wright County's example in the following article.



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After research and work by the ISAC Legislative Policy Committee, staff, and members, ISAC's legislative policy statement with the above recommendations gained the interest of legislators during the 2020 legislative session. Unfortunately, the bill wasn't able to reach final passage in the waning hours of the pandemic-shortened session. Last year's momentum, the increased spotlight on EMS due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the continued need to keep essential services in our rural areas all bring optimism to our goal of having this priority signed by the Governor in 2021.

All Iowans deserve timely and high-quality Emergency Medical Services. The 2021 Iowa Legislature should provide counties with this option to adequately fund this essential service. Please contact your legislators and let them know how important this would be for your county.

# Feature - Home Rule Continued

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- Multiple bills that would allow ATVs on secondary roads statewide when it should be a local decision made by the board of supervisors in consultation with the county attorney, engineer, and sheriff.
- Multiple zoning bills that pre-empt the authority of local zoning commissions and boards of adjustment to make the decisions they believe are best for their community.
- Multiple bills attacking assessors and taking more and more power away from the local conference board.
- Multiple bills attempting to interfere with county organization, including composition of the boards of supervisors, elected official compensation, and the number of counties in Iowa.
- Multiple tax bills that affect county revenue streams, place limits on annual property tax revenue, and place revenue limits and spending directives on mental health services.
- Multiple elections bills that take away county decision making and put in place unfunded mandates.

Unfortunately, this is not even an exhaustive list. Every legislative session ISAC continues to champion county home rule, but that often means opposing legislation that would fly in the face of local control. As stated earlier, there are limitations to the constitutional amendment and regrettably the state sometimes uses the letter of the law when they don't agree with decisions being made at the local level or when the legislature believes they know what's best at the local level. There should be a heavier focus on the spirit of the law – allowing county elected and appointed officials to make the decisions they believe will best serve their communities.



# Feature - ISAC Legislative Priorities

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## The First County to Make EMS an Essential Service

Wright County has a unique population make up. Unlike most Iowa counties that have one large city and several smaller towns, Wright County has three larger communities (relative to other towns in the county) and five smaller towns. Clarion is the county seat and is centrally located in the county, 15 miles to the northeast is Belmond, and 15 miles to the southwest is Eagle Grove. Each of these communities has their own school system, fire department, police department, grocery stores, retirement facilities, restaurants, shopping destinations, library, grain elevators, insurance agencies, and yes, they also each have their own independent Emergency Medical Services (EMS) ambulance system. The smaller city of Dows also had an EMS ambulance system. That is a total of four independent EMS services in the county. For years this had worked very well for the cities and county, but the health care system was changing.

In early 2016, the Wright County Board of Supervisors realized they had a crisis looming on the horizon. All EMS services in Wright County were experiencing difficulty in scheduling, training, and retaining volunteer responders. They were experiencing lower reimbursements from individuals and insurance companies along with increased operational costs. In July the City of Dows discontinued its ambulance service, resulting in an increase of response area to the remaining services of Wright County.

By the middle of 2016, the Board of Supervisors, in cooperation with each city in Wright County, adopted a resolution declaring EMS as an “Essential Service” and appointing the Wright County EMS System Advisory Council to provide guidance, research, and recommendations to the Board of Supervisors. A timeline was then developed to assist in the next steps with an EMS system that allowed for quality pre-hospital care for persons living, working, and traveling in Wright County. The Advisory Council worked with the local independent EMS service agencies to develop a plan to maintain and enhance the EMS available in Wright County.

By the middle of 2018, the Wright County EMS System Advisory Council came back to the Board of Supervisors with the recommendation that it was in the best interest of the county to provide additional funding for a period of five years as provided in Iowa Code Chapter 422D. A budget of \$586,652 was drafted for the enhanced EMS System to provide additional funding for: response area coverage, rural call reimbursement, training, equipment, and staffing.

The plan allows each of the ambulance services to remain independent, with agreements requiring quarterly reporting to the EMS coordinator and participation in quarterly and annual trainings to be eligible for the funding assistance. The EMS Coordinator and EMS service directors work together to develop county-wide EMS system standards that align with the Iowa EMS System Standards.

The Board of Supervisors called a special election on August 7, 2018, for an ad valorem property tax pursuant to Iowa Code Chapter 422D, and the vote passed. The new EMS agreement began in the 2019 - 2020 fiscal year, and will be in effect for five years.



**Karl Helgevold**

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Join Karl and team for a webinar on January 20. Sign up at [www.iowacounties.org](http://www.iowacounties.org). Click on webinars under the meetings and events tab.

Continues on page 10.

# Feature - Wright County Continued

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There are many significant wins that came from making EMS an Essential Service in Wright County and developing the Wright County EMS System.

- There is now a greater opportunity to identify the best care practices – not only capitalizing on the good, but also working to address and improve any broken processes.
- As a unified organization, they will be able to ensure that all EMS staff receives the same onsite training and education to ensure the skills and necessary procedures.
- More efficient in addressing the complex needs of the service area with better organized personnel and equipment.
- One shared medical director with the same EMS protocols among all the services in the county.
- Funding of a quick response vehicle operated by Iowa Specialty Hospital's Belmont Ambulance Service which provides advanced life support to outlying areas.
- EMS agencies have been able to add additional staff and have combined training opportunities to provide EMT and paramedic training to new volunteers and staff.
- Services have upgraded equipment with the new funding for pagers, hand-held radios, and defibrillators.

There are many lessons to be gleaned from a small, rural county in Iowa. When you gather the right people to the table, consider all the options, choose the best approaches, and ensure consistent and quality patient care for the citizens you can almost never go wrong. Some might even venture to say they did it the wRight way!

## ISAC Meetings Update

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Welcome to 2021! Hopefully the New Year will bring the opportunity for us to safely meet in person again soon. We very much miss seeing all of you at and offering the unmatched benefits of ISAC in-person events. However, we must move forward as best we can, and the ISAC Member Relations Team continues to provide great educational opportunities for Iowa county official and professionals.

Below we've included a list of changes that have been made to our first quarter events. As more changes occur, we'll be sure to communicate with you via email. Don't get our emails? Send a request to be added to our list to [support@iowacounties.org](mailto:support@iowacounties.org).

### **ISAC New County Officers School**

Online Library of Recorded Presentations and Materials - Coming in late January.

This Basecamp site will also offer message boards where questions can be asked, information can be shared, and networking can be accomplished.

Registration available now for \$150.

### **Statewide Supervisors Meeting**

Live Virtual Event – January 28, 2021

Registration available now for \$25.

(Don't forget to also sign up for the Certified Iowa County Supervisor Program! It's free and available now.)

### **County Day at the Capitol**

Live Virtual Event – February 17, 2021

Registration coming soon!

### **ISAC Spring Conference**

Tentative – In-person Conference

March 11-12, 2021

Registration coming soon!

The agenda has been modified to allow for social distancing, and the General Session including the opportunity to vote on the FY 2022 ISAC Budget will be held via live webinar event on March 24. More information is available at [www.iowacounties.org](http://www.iowacounties.org) and will be sent soon via email.

### **ISAC Webinars**

ISAC will continue to increase on online programming. Please take advantage of these short, educational events from the comfort of your office either live or view the recordings as your schedule allows. Even more will be added to the schedule soon!

Emergency Medical Services Webinar – January 20, 2021

Statewide Supervisors Meeting – January 28, 2021

County Day at the Capitol – February 17, 2021

Public Health Webinar – February 17, 2021

ISAC Spring Conference General Session – March 24, 2021





# Iowa State Association of Counties

## 2021 Legislative Policy Committee

The 2021 ISAC Legislative Priorities were developed by the ISAC Legislative Policy Committee (LPC). This committee is composed of two representatives from each affiliate and is chaired by Richard Crouch, Mills County Supervisor and ISAC 2nd Vice-President. The committee has worked together to create a short and cohesive set of legislative objectives for ISAC to pursue in 2021.

At the beginning of September the committee convened to hear legislative policy proposals from each affiliate. The committee worked hard discussing implications of any changes. Between the first and second September meetings at which the legislative objectives were adopted by the committee, staff and committee members performed research on any questions that needed to be answered or clarifications that needed to be made.

The 2021 Legislative Objectives, Policy Statements, and ISAC Top Priorities recommendations were presented to the membership, which voted online to recommend them to the ISAC Board of Directors. The Board approved the legislative package and set ISAC's Top Priorities during its November meeting.

### 2021 ISAC LPC Committee Members

**Committee Chair:** Richard Crouch, Mills County Supervisor and ISAC 2nd Vice-President

#### Assessors

Pam Jensen, Adair County  
Tom Van Buer, Johnson County

#### County Attorneys

Darin Raymond, Plymouth County  
Matt Wilber, Pottawattamie County

#### Information Technology

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Travis Gerrish, Franklin County

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Russell Wood, Franklin County

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Lyle Brehm, Tama/Poweshiek County  
Dan Eckert, Dickinson County

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Stacie Herridge, Story County  
John Murphy, Dubuque County

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Patty Hamann, Cedar County  
Chris Oliver, Wright County

#### Conservation

Dan Cohen, Buchanan County  
Matt Cosgrove, Webster County

#### Environmental Health

Eric Bradley, Scott County  
Brian Hanft, Cerro Gordo County

#### Sheriffs and Deputies

Brian Gardner, Linn County  
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## Table of Contents

### 2021 Top Legislative Priorities

Mental Health and Disability Services .....	3
Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Backfill .....	3
Iowa's Natural Resources, Outdoor Recreation, and Water Quality and Quantity .....	3
Emergency Medical Service .....	4

### Legislative Objectives

Assessment Review Timelines Following a Disaster Declaration .....	4
Broadband Expansion .....	4
Certificates of Title .....	4
Commercial Driver's License Testing .....	5
Distracted Driving .....	5
Elimination of Voter Acknowledgement Card .....	5
Emergency Preparedness Supply Weekend .....	5
Local Emergency Management Payment Funds .....	5
Low-income Elderly and Disabled Credit .....	5
Non-transferable Vehicle Registration .....	6
Prisoner Room and Board .....	6
Property Tax Sale Postponement or Cancellation .....	6
Public Measures on General Election Ballot .....	6
Super Speeders .....	6
Surviving Joint Tenant .....	6
Surviving Spouse Title/Registration Fee .....	6

# ISAC Top Priorities

## **Mental Health and Disability Services**

**PROBLEM:** Addressing long-term, sustainable funding has been an issue since Iowa moved to a regional based mental health and disability services (MH/DS) delivery system. This need has only increased as new services for addressing complex mental health needs and services for children have now been mandated on the regions without any financial support from the state or giving the counties/regions the necessary ability to fund these services on their own. This situation has been complicated further by the tremendous demand for basic core mental health services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, as mental health access centers begin to provide services, we have seen implementation challenges that need to be addressed to make sure all parties are best served.

**SOLUTION:** ISAC recommends that the 2021 Legislature:

1. Provide the needed funding to counties/regions to ensure stability in the MH/DS delivery system due to the increased demand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and state mandates for additional services.
2. If no essential revenue is provided from the state, counties should be allowed to exceed their current maximum per capita levy of \$47.28 to fund new services.
3. If the above remedies to the lack of funding are not advanced, counties/regions should be allowed flexibility in the implementation of recent mandates and not be penalized if circumstances prevent implementation of those services. Specifically, the recent mandates are those related to the following:
  - a. New services for complex mental health needs.
  - b. The second set of services for children's mental health: crisis stabilization residential beds, inpatient, and crisis stabilization community-based services.
4. The requirement that counties can only carry forward a fund balance of 40% should be delayed or eliminated.
5. Review current Iowa statutes and administrative rules pertaining to access centers to ensure they meet the needs of the patient, mental health region, and county law enforcement. In addition, there should be an exploration of ways to streamline the involuntary commitment process to address this as well.

## **Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Backfill**

**PROBLEM:** The taxable valuation of commercial and industrial property was legislatively reduced by 10% beginning in FY 2015. A standing appropriation from the state to local property taxing jurisdictions was implemented to make up for the future reduction in property tax revenue due to this rollback. Local jurisdictions are already absorbing property tax revenue reductions due to the rollback on the new multi-residential classification, the rollback on railroad property, the new exemption for telecommunications property, and the reduced growth limitation for residential and agricultural property. Any reduction or elimination of the commercial and industrial property tax backfill would likely cause a property tax increase that would fall largely on homeowners and agricultural property owners, a reduction in important services the residents of Iowa depend on, or a combination of both.

**SOLUTION:** The legislature should fully fund the commercial and industrial property tax backfill and should resist legislation implementing a rapid elimination or that affects local budgets that have been set or are in the process of being set.

## **Iowa's Natural Resources, Outdoor Recreation, and Water Quality and Quantity**

**PROBLEM:** There continues to be a need to provide adequate, sustainable, and dedicated state financial resources to address state-wide needs related to Iowa's natural resources, outdoor recreation, and water quality. Water quantity management also is needed to minimize or mitigate damage caused by floods. In 2010, Iowans voted to add the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreational Trust Fund to the Iowa Constitution to address these and other natural resources and outdoor recreation needs. Unfortunately, the Trust has yet to receive any funding. The Trust Fund is the best-known mechanism to address Iowa's natural resources, outdoor recreation, and water concerns and, in so doing, promotes public health, rural revitalization, economic growth, and quality of life for Iowans. The Trust will be a legacy for generations to come.

The Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Program is authorized in Iowa Code to receive \$20 million annually, plus revenues from the sale of natural resource license plates. However, the program has never been fully funded and in recent years cuts have been more dramatic, with some funding diverted to state park operations and maintenance. The REAP Program is scheduled to sunset in 2023. This important state program provides diverse funding for Iowa's historical resources, county parks, city parks, public green space, conservation education, roadside vegetation management, and state open spaces.

**SOLUTION:** Next page

# ISAC Top Priorities

SOLUTION: ISAC recommends the following:

1. Passage of a state-wide sales tax increase of at least 3/8th of one cent, to fund the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund as per the Iowa Constitution. This will also fully fund REAP.
2. Absent the Trust Fund, REAP should be fully funded, with a sunset extended until at least 2031.
3. Funds from the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust should be distributed through a formula that maintains the integrity of the constitutional amendment, similar to language found in Iowa Code Chapter 461. This funding formula was developed by the Sustainable Funding Committee, and was the basis upon which Iowans voted to establish the Trust Fund in 2010
4. The passage of legislation that would support and encourage public sector entities, such as counties, to be directly involved in water mitigation projects that would involve county conservation boards, engineers, and supervisors.

## **Emergency Medical Services**

PROBLEM: Emergency Medical Services (EMS) are insufficient in many parts of the state due to a lack of a stable funding mechanism, leaving rural residents lacking vital services in a time of need.

SOLUTION: ISAC recommends the passage of legislation intended to provide better coverage and adequate funding of EMS in the unincorporated areas by allowing boards of supervisors to declare EMS an essential service and put in place an ad valorem property tax to fund the operations

# Legislative Objectives

## **Assessment Review Timelines Following a Disaster Declaration**

PROBLEM: In years in which federal disaster declarations are issued, the filing deadlines for assessment protests to the Board of Review and the Board's timeline can be extended. However, the dates enumerated in Iowa Code Chapter 441 are inconsistent and there are gaps in time periods when extensions are authorized. Additionally, there is no authorization to extend the time period for informal assessment reviews when there is a federal disaster declaration.

SOLUTION: Amend Iowa Code Chapter 441 to change the filing dates for the Board of Review to May 1 through June 5, to authorize the Director of the Department of Revenue to extend the meeting timeline of the Board of Review to July 15, and to change the deadline for informal assessment reviews to May 25 in years that there is a federal disaster declaration.

## **Broadband Expansion**

PROBLEM: High-speed broadband internet service is not readily available in many parts of rural Iowa and even in some urban areas. Broadband access is required to grow existing and to attract new business and industry, keep people connected, and provide for the education of Iowa's children.

SOLUTION: ISAC encourages continued efforts for broadband expansion, but it must be achieved without inhibiting local control of decision making and zoning ordinances.

## **Certificates of Title**

PROBLEM: Iowa Code Chapter 321 outlines the process for the issuance of certificates of title and the initial registration of certain vehicles. The code currently requires certificates of title, initial registrations, releases of security interest, and replacement titles be done in the county of residence or primary use. Emerging technology allows the administration of these activities and the collection of associated fees to be done in any county to provide customer convenience.

SOLUTION: Amend Iowa Code Chapter 321 to allow for the issuance of certificates of title, initial registrations, releases of security interest, and issuance of replacement titles to be performed in any county. This amendment should not apply to mobile homes or manufactured homes, or to applications for title submitted through the electronic process. The fees for these issuances should be increased by \$5 to help the counties financially adapt to the procedural change.



# Legislative Objectives

## **Commercial Driver's License Testing**

**PROBLEM:** The administration of the commercial driver's license (CDL) skills testing is time consuming for county treasurer's office staff, and with no fee, that time is being paid by property taxes. Additionally, it creates longer wait times for other customers when an employee is away from the office administering the test.

**SOLUTION:** Amend Iowa Code 321M to allow the county treasurer to charge up to \$60 for administering a CDL skills test, equating to \$20 for each of the three parts of the test.

## **Distracted Driving**

**PROBLEM:** Distracted, inexperienced, and impaired driving, as well as other factors, result in hundreds of deaths on Iowa's roadways each year. While there is no simple solution to reduce the number of highway fatalities, there needs to be an enhanced effort on the awareness of the dangers of distracted and impaired driving. Legislation passed in 2017 to make texting while driving a primary offense is a step in the right direction, but more can be done to ensure "hands-free" driving.

**SOLUTION:** ISAC supports legislation to prohibit the use of a hand-held electronic communication devices while operating a motor vehicle and to make the use a primary offense.

## **Elimination of Voter Acknowledgement Card**

**PROBLEM:** Requiring that voters receive both a voter acknowledgement card and a voter PIN card when only one would suffice for voter id purposes is duplicative and is an unneeded expense of taxpayer resources.

**SOLUTION:** Eliminate the requirement of a voter acknowledgement card in Iowa Code.

## **Emergency Preparedness Supply Weekend**

**PROBLEM:** Many Iowa homes, families, and businesses are ill prepared for a disaster and self-preparedness is a key objective to building resilient communities across Iowa.

**SOLUTION:** To mitigate this issue, ISAC supports the establishment of a "sales tax holiday" in conjunction with National Preparedness Month. This could be used to offset the expenses for purchases of emergency preparedness supplies such as generators, fuel storage containers, bottled water, first aid kits, flashlights/batteries, etc.

## **Local Emergency Management Payment Funds**

**PROBLEM:** Current Iowa law states that "expenditures from the local emergency management fund shall be made on warrants drawn by the county auditor, supported by claims and vouchers signed by the emergency management coordinator or chairperson of the commission." This restriction is problematic when the coordinator and chairperson may be unavailable to sign a warrant due to medical procedures, travel, or illness.

**SOLUTION:** Amend Iowa Code 29C.17.5 to state "Expenditures from the local emergency management fund shall be made on warrants drawn by the county auditor, supported by claims and vouchers signed by the emergency management coordinator, ~~or~~ chairperson of the commission, or, when specified in commission bylaws, other positions that are commission members or commission employees hired in accordance with section 29C.17.7." This modification allows commission bills to still get paid by individuals designated by the commission.

## **Low-income Elderly and Disabled Credit**

**PROBLEM:** Rising property values can lead to increases in property taxes, which is particularly burdensome for individuals like the low-income elderly and the disabled that may own their property but are on a fixed income. The Low-income Elderly and Disabled Tax Credit is helpful but the dollar cap has become insufficient over time as tax burdens increase.

**SOLUTION:** The state should increase the Elderly and Disabled Tax Credit limit from \$1,000 to \$2,000 and fully fund the reimbursement to local governments.

# Legislative Objectives

## **Non-transferable Vehicle Registration**

**PROBLEM:** Under current law an owner of a foreign vehicle that does not possess the foreign certificate of title must obtain an Iowa title prior to transfer of ownership unless the transfer is to a licensed dealer in which case the requirement is waived. In the case of a totaled vehicle, the insurance company must require the owner to get an Iowa title in their name before obtaining a salvage title.

**SOLUTION:** Amend Iowa Code 321 to waive the requirement for an owner to obtain an Iowa title for a foreign vehicle without a foreign title in the case of an insurance company taking possession.

## **Prisoner Room and Board**

**PROBLEM:** During the 2020 legislative session, SF 457 was passed which eliminated counties ability to collect prisoner room and board fees through restitution and instead requires these fees to be collected through a separate civil action filing. This process takes additional efforts and resources for the counties to attempt to collect these fees. Furthermore, there is a lack of clarity regarding the priority of a county's claim for room and board fees collected through a separate civil action process.

**SOLUTION:** Allow counties flexibility in the methods used to collect prisoner room and board fees and clarify that fees collected through a separate civil action are separate and distinct from the court fees in the associated criminal case, and any funds collected on the judgment would be applied against that judgment first.

## **Property Tax Sale Postponement or Cancellation**

**PROBLEM:** Under current law the annual property tax sale for delinquent taxes is set for the third Monday in June and allowed to be moved to a different date in June if for good cause it cannot be held. Previous natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic proved that a later date in June is not always possible.

**SOLUTION:** Amend Iowa Code 446 to allow the county treasurer to postpone the tax sale on a monthly basis or cancel the sale and offer the parcels at the next annual tax sale if taxes remain delinquent.

## **Public Measures on General Election Ballot**

**PROBLEM:** Current provisions in Iowa Code do not allow for public measures to be placed on the general election ballot. This creates the environment of having more special elections which means additional cost to taxpayers.

**SOLUTION:** Amend Iowa Code §39.2 and the other numerous code sections that are relative to special elections to allow public measures to be placed on the general election ballot.

## **Super Speeders**

**PROBLEM:** Iowa law makes it extremely difficult to prosecute high rates of speed as reckless vehicular homicide when such conduct results in the death of another. Iowa's reckless standard is higher than just about anywhere else in the country, at times leaving excessive speed resulting in the death of another as a simple misdemeanor traffic violation. According to NHTSA, speed-related deaths increased 4% in 2016, while deaths caused by drunk drivers increased only 1.7%.

**SOLUTION:** Enhance penalties by amending Iowa's vehicular homicide statute to include exceeding the speed limit by 25 miles per hour or more resulting in the death of another.

## **Surviving Joint Tenant**

**PROBLEM:** Iowa Code Chapter 558 requires an affidavit of or on behalf of a surviving joint tenant when recording a real estate transfer that includes "substantially" seven items. This has created inconsistencies statewide in which information is included.

**SOLUTION:** To provide uniformity statewide the word "substantially" should be removed from Iowa Code 558.66(3)(b).

## **Surviving Spouse Title/Registration Fee**

**PROBLEM:** When updating the title and registration of a boat, snowmobile, or off-highway vehicle to remove a decedent, the surviving spouse must pay a transfer fee and title fee.

**SOLUTION:** Amend Iowa Code 321G, 321I, and 462A to waive the transfer and title fee when updating registration and title for a surviving spouse.

## ISAC County Government Illustrated Essay Contest

We are looking forward to hearing from Iowa's youth about what they think about county government in Iowa and why it is so important. The Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC) is now accepting illustrated essay submissions of up to 500 words from Iowa children age 12 and under. Illustrations should be no larger than an 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper. Please share this announcement in your local communities.

Essays will be judged by an internal committee, and the three winning submissions will be included in the April issue of *The Iowa County magazine*. All submissions will receive a certificate of participation. ISAC will send winners a prize package and notify their local media. Winners will be chosen based on essay and illustration creativity, positivity, originality, and overall impression.

Please submit any questions, essays, and illustrations to Rachel at [rbennett@iowacounties.org](mailto:rbennett@iowacounties.org). We suggest a photo or scanned copy of handwritten essays and illustrations. Word documents of electronic essays are preferred, but PDFs will be accepted. Deadline for submissions is Friday, February 12.

Include with your submission:

1. Name
2. Birthdate
3. Address
4. County of residence
5. Grade/school
6. Favorite hobbies
7. Illustration (must fit on 8.5 x 11" sheet of paper)
8. Essay (up to 500 words)
9. \*Optional – Picture of child (please know that if a picture is included we reserve the right to publish in publications and on our web and social media sites)

### Qualifications

- Age: 12 and under (birth year 2009 or later)
- Resident of Iowa

### Essay topic question ideas

- How do Iowa county officials make the lives of those who live and work in their communities better?
- What services are most important that Iowa county officials provide? Why?
- Why is county government important in Iowa?

Educational video about why Counties Matter:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j6y4J6PLkPg>



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### IPAIT Earns GFOA Award for Excellence

The Iowa Public Agency Investment Trust (IPAIT) is pleased to announce that it has been awarded the certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for its comprehensive annual financial report (CAFR) for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2019. The GFOA established the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting Program (CAFR Program) in 1945 to encourage and assist state and local governments to go beyond the minimum requirements of generally accepted accounting principles to prepare comprehensive annual financial reports that confirm the spirit of transparency and full disclosure, also recognizing individual governments that succeed in achieving that goal. The objective of the program is not to assess the financial health of participating governments, but rather to ensure that users of their financial statements have the information they need to do so themselves.

Reports submitted to the CAFR program are reviewed by selected members of the GFOA professional staff and the GFOA Special Review Committee (SRC), which comprises individuals with expertise in public sector financial reporting and includes financial statement preparers, independent auditors, academics, and other finance professionals. Visit <https://www.ipait.org/> to view the report.

#### About IPAIT:

The Iowa State Association of Counties sponsors IPAIT, which was created pursuant to Iowa Code Chapter 28E in 1987 to enable eligible Iowa public agencies to conveniently and effectively invest their available operating and reserve funds. IPAIT is governed by a nine person Board of Trustees made up of eligible Participants of the Trust. Today, IPAIT serves over 400 Iowa public entities. The IPAIT – Diversified portfolio has been assigned a principal stability fund rating of ‘AAAm’ by S&P Global Ratings. A fund rated ‘AAAm’ demonstrates extremely strong capacity to maintain principal stability and to limit exposure to principal losses due to credit risk. ‘AAAm’ is the highest principal stability fund rating assigned by S&P Global Ratings. This is accomplished through conservative investment practices and strict internal controls.

IPAIT continues to be focused upon its investment objectives in order of priority, which are safety of invested principal, followed by maintenance of adequate liquidity, followed by evaluation of available yield while seeking to maintain a net asset value of \$1.00 per share. Within these objectives, the Diversified portfolio strives to provide Participants with the best available rates of return for legally authorized investments.



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# ISAC Preferred Vendor Spotlight

## Neapolitan Labs Helps County Governments Across Iowa

In December, Neapolitan Labs launched a new website for Jones County ([jonescountyiowa.gov](http://jonescountyiowa.gov)), one of three countywide websites we rolled out in 2020. The redesigned site is user-friendly and makes county services more accessible to the public — a goal for all county websites we've launched.

The website's features include a prominent search tool, a department and services directory, easy-to-access board of supervisors' meeting minutes and agendas, a calendar of events, and frequently asked questions. The website's many upgrades are perhaps most evident on conservation board pages which now include a visual park directory, a list of virtual education programs, and a cabin reservation request form.

Earlier in 2020, Neapolitan Labs launched websites for Crawford ([crawfordcounty.iowa.gov](http://crawfordcounty.iowa.gov)) and Pottawattamie ([pottcounty-ia.gov](http://pottcounty-ia.gov)) counties. The Crawford County site redesign made it mobile-friendly for the first time — a much-needed improvement when an increasing amount of internet traffic comes from mobile devices compared to traditional computers. Also mobile-friendly, the new Pottawattamie County website features an intranet, allowing county employees to conveniently log into an employee portal, access human resources documents, submit tickets for their IT department, and more.

All three county sites also include alert messages for the county as a whole and for individual departments — an increasingly important feature this year for COVID-19 updates. Alerts can also be used for approaching county deadlines, closures, and other important reminders.

In addition to countywide websites, Neapolitan Labs has worked with one in six county auditors to build standalone election websites. The sites provide residents with resources and how-tos for registering to vote, requesting absentee ballots, easy-to-navigate precinct and polling center lists, lists of elected officials from the federal level to township representatives, election news, and general election information. One of our favorite features for these sites is a visual tool that allows auditors to input election results for highlighted races, which are then populated as an easy-to-read chart on their election results page.

In addition to county government and county election websites, Neapolitan Labs has completed stand-alone projects for secondary roads, sheriff, and public health departments to better meet their needs and communicate more efficiently with the public.

We'd love to chat with you to discuss building a website for your department or your county. Visit [NeapolitanLabs.com](http://NeapolitanLabs.com) or call 515.999.5221 for more information.




**Website Development  
for Iowa Counties**

**Brian McMillin, President**  
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# 2021 Calendar

## January 2021

- New County Officer's School  
(Online Library)
- 15 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting  
(Virtual)
- 20 ISAC EMS Webinar  
(Virtual)
- 27 ISAC Executive Committee  
(Virtual)
- 28 Statewide Supervisors Meeting  
(Virtual)

## February 2021

- 10 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting  
(Virtual)
- 17 ISAC County Day at the Capitol  
(Virtual)
- 17 ISAC Public Health Webinar  
(Virtual)

## March 2021

- 11-12 ISAC Spring Conference  
(Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit  
Union Convention Center, Des Moines)
- 24 ISAC Spring Conference General Session Webinar  
(Virtual)

## April 2021

- 5-9 Iowa Governor's Conference on Public Health  
(Virtual)
- 11-14 ISSDA Civil School  
(Holiday Inn Airport, Des Moines)
- 28 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting  
(YTBD)

## May 2021

- 11-14 Treasurers May School  
(Doubletree Hilton Conference Center, Cedar Rapids)

## June 2021

- 23 ISAC Scholarship Golf Fundraiser  
(Toad Valley, Pleasant Hill)

## July 2021

- 7 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting  
(YTBD)

## August 2021

- 25-27 ISAC Annual Conference  
(Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit  
Union Convention Center, Des Moines)
- 26 ISAC Casino Night Fundraiser  
(Hilton Des Moines Downtown)

## September 2021

- 12-15 ISSDA Fall Jail School  
(Airport Holiday Inn, Des Moines)
- 15-17 ISAC Board of Directors Retreat  
(Delaware County)

## October 2021

- 12-14 Records Annual School  
(Dubuque)

## November 2021

- 17 ISAC Board of Directors Meeting  
(YTBD)

## December 2021

- 1-3 ICEA Conference  
(Veterans Memorial Community Choice Credit  
Union Convention Center, Des Moines)
- 5-8 ISSDA Winter School  
(Holiday Inn Des Moines Airport)

If you have any questions about the meetings listed above or would like to add an affiliate meeting to the ISAC calendar, please contact Kelsey Sebern at [ksebern@iowacounties.org](mailto:ksebern@iowacounties.org).

## 2021 ISAC Preferred Vendors

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### Elite Preferred Vendor

IP Pathways

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Managing Director  
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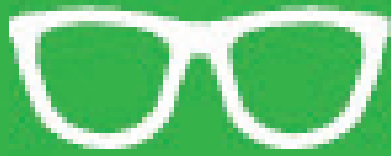


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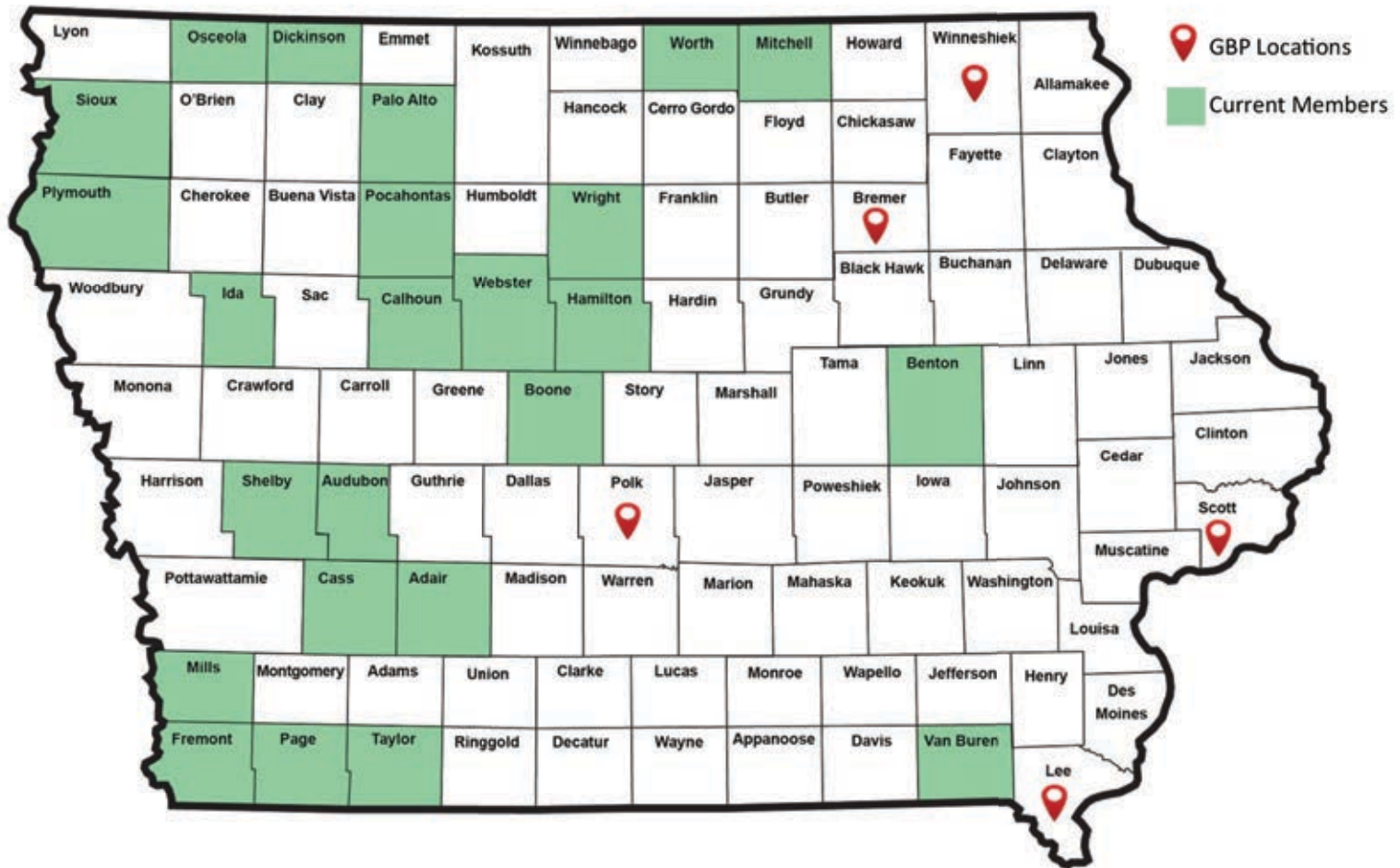
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