

2023 ISAC Legislative Priorities

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2023 ISAC 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.

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 \$10 to help the counties financially adapt to the procedural change.

Civil Commitments

PROBLEM: Iowa Code Chapter 229, Mental Health Civil Commitment, is outdated and needs to be modernized. This has resulted in a lack of clarity of the role of Judicial Advocates and the need for assistance to ensure Judicial Advocates can perform the duties that are expected of them

SOLUTION: ISAC supports the addition of clarifying language in the various areas of Chapter 229 that aid in this process.

Competency and Treatment for Persons in the Justice System (LPC Recommended Top Priority)

PROBLEM: Inmates are confined in county jails when their criminal cases are suspended pending a competency evaluation and treatment (if deemed appropriate) per Iowa Code Chapter 812. Those individuals are frequently mentally ill with exacerbation of severe symptomology. Wait times for inmates in county jails to the Iowa Medical and Classification Center (IMCC) can be three to nine months and at Cherokee Mental Health Institution (MHI) two to four months. The inmate frequently remains untreated and symptomatic behaviors include suicidal and homicidal ideation, assaultive behaviors, delusional thinking, etc.

Those inmates who are found 'not competent and not restorable' have their criminal proceedings dismissed per law. They are typically returned to the community due to limited beds in the two remaining MHIs. It is rare that MHIs or private community providers have security staff for those individuals who, due to their incompetence, continue to have assaultive or dangerous behaviors. There have been four Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) complaints filed since 2013 resulting in tens of thousands of dollars in fines against the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS). It is unknown if or how many civil lawsuits have been filed by staff who have been permanently disabled or the total cost to the State of Iowa.

Iowa Law established competency evaluations to be done for certain individuals who have mental health/brain health issues who have been arrested in Iowa Code Chapter 812.

Four problems currently exist:

1. It can take three to nine months to get a person into state programs that provide the evaluations.
2. Iowa law is unclear on who is responsible for payment of the competency stay under Iowa Code §812.3.
3. When persons are determined incompetent to stand trial, they are not always able to access services while incarcerated and instead, their illnesses may continue to exacerbate.

4. Frequently, hospitals are not able to accept placements of individuals with high acuity into their inpatient psychiatric units due to the level of care that they require and the level of care that can be provided in the unit.

SOLUTION: Iowa Code §812.3 should be changed to clarify which state agency is responsible for competency evaluations and holds for persons with mental health/brain health issues.

The state should appropriate dollars necessary to expand the number of beds available for competency evaluations so persons do not need to wait, possibly without services or medication, for extended periods of time to get the evaluations done. This should include programs to treat and supervise individuals found not guilty by reason of insanity (Rule 2.2).

The development of a civil forensic unit should be explored at the state's current MHIs for non-violent offenders and at IMCC for offenders who may be considered dangerous. Once an individual is deemed not restorable but still a danger to the community, that person should be placed in the appropriate unit. If at a certain point, that individual is no longer in the custody of the department of corrections, they should be funded by DHS. There needs to be a change in the Iowa Code process in 812 that changes their custody from the Department of Corrections (DOC) to DHS at that point. This is not a 229 issue. Because this originated out of a criminal proceeding, it should not be turned over to 229.

DHS and DOC need to jointly develop a civil forensic unit with input from law enforcement, MH/DS Regions, Judicial Mental Health Advocate, etc. There needs to be a facility where individuals with mental illness can obtain treatment in a secure environment. This will also allow those who have been found 'not competent and not restorable' a multi-tiered program based upon the individual's acuity for a safe reentry to the community.

The Iowa DHS and other state agencies should work with the Iowa Community Services Association and the Iowa State Sheriffs' and Deputies' Association to implement Tertiary Care Hospitals in the state that are geographically dispersed to meet the needs of individuals who need a higher level of care than is currently available in an inpatient unit in Iowa.

Conduct of Elections

PROBLEM: In the 2020 General Election, several voters who requested an absentee ballot by mail showed up to vote on the same day the ballots were to be mailed, or in the two to three days following the mailing of the absentee ballot. If the voter insisted on voting in person, the absentee ballot that was mailed had to be voided. This is a waste of resources and caused counties to order additional ballots to account for the extra waste.

SOLUTION: Modify Iowa Code §53.8(1)(a) to read as follows: Upon receipt of an application for an absentee ballot and immediately after the absentee ballots are printed, but no more than ~~twenty days before the election~~ five days prior to in-person absentee voting pursuant to section 53.10, subsection 1., the commissioner shall mail an absentee ballot to the applicant within 24 hours, except as otherwise provided in subsection 3.

Confidentiality of Information

PROBLEM: Iowa law is more stringent than federal law for exchanging information covered by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). HIPAA allows for the sharing of protected health information (PHI) and ePHI for treatment, payment, and healthcare operations. State law requires releases to do much of this. This affects counties and MH/DS regions when working among themselves and with providers in the General Assistance, Substance Abuse, and Region offices. Public Health, Home Health, and Veterans Affairs agencies are also affected. This requires clients to fill out additional forms and slows down the referral and treatment process.

SOLUTION: ISAC supports changes in the appropriate sections of Iowa Code to align state confidentiality laws with federal protections, but not more stringent.

Elderly and Disabled Tax Credit Filing Dates

PROBLEM: Under current law county treasurers can accept applications for the elderly and disabled property tax credit between January 1 and September 30 each year. Many factors, including the health issues and cognitive ability of applicants, lead to late applications. These applicants can be refunded the amount of the credit, but only after paying the full amount due and completing the refund process through the Department of Revenue.

SOLUTION: Amend Iowa Code §425.20 to change the filing deadline for the elderly and disabled property tax credit from September 30 to March 31. This allows for application up to the point of second half taxes being due and is sufficient time for additions to the

elderly and disabled property tax credit affidavit submitted to the Department of Revenue. This change would ensure that applicants that qualify receive the credit without the refund process and would reduce the chance of delinquent taxes leading to the property being offered at tax sale.

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 Medical Services (LPC Recommended Top Priority)

PROBLEM: The authority to declare emergency medical services (EMS) an essential county service and seek voter approval for a dedicated ad valorem property tax is a positive step to ensure proper coverage areas and predictable funding. However, EMS coverage areas do not always conform to county geographic lines, and this will lead to inequities in who pays for the available service and a lack of service area coordination. The current funding authority could also be improved to accommodate changing needs as a county or regional EMS system is implemented and administered.

SOLUTION: Amend Iowa Code to allow two or more counties to form an EMS coverage area with the same levy rate for all property owners within the district, while maintaining the same requirements as individual counties for voter approval, advisory council responsibilities, and reporting. Further, the legislature should authorize the EMS governance board to set the annual levy rate, after initial voter approval, at a level sufficient to cover the anticipated costs.

Emergency Preparedness Supply Weekend

PROBLEM: Many Iowa homes, families, and businesses are ill prepared for a disaster and self-preparedness is a key objective for 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.

Eminent Domain

PROBLEM: Multiple hazardous material, underground pipelines are being proposed for construction in Iowa and the use of eminent domain to secure land rights will continue to be contemplated. Aside from submitting concerns to the Iowa Utilities Board (IUB), landowners and county supervisors have little local control in ensuring property rights. The proposed pipelines are not a public utility, and arguably do not provide a public use or public purpose that would trigger the eminent domain authority.

SOLUTION: Amend Iowa Code Chapter 479B to prohibit the use of eminent domain by a carbon sequestration or other hazardous material pipeline company that is not a public utility and that is not serving a public use and/or purpose.

Iowa's Natural Resources, Outdoor Recreation, and Water Quality and Quantity (LPC Recommended Top Priority)

PROBLEM: Iowa's natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities are significantly under-funded at the state level. The Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund remains empty since it was established in 2010. Legislators and the Governor have yet to raise the state sales tax – the funding mechanism in the Iowa Constitution. The funding formula in state law (Iowa Code Chapter 461) is favored by counties, but changes to the formula are expected. In the end, any changes to the funding distribution in Iowa Code must meet the integrity of the language that was inserted into the Iowa Constitution in 2010.

SOLUTION: Raise the sales tax by a minimum of a 3/8-cent and retain the integrity of the formula to meet the promises defined in the Iowa Constitution. Any change to the funding formula should be acceptable to county conservation boards. There have been proposals to fund the Trust in the past as part of broader tax plans. Any proposal that funds the Trust, retains the integrity of the funding formula, and is a large, net win for conservation is worthy of consideration.

IPERS Status for Emergency Management Personnel

PROBLEM: The responsibilities of emergency management personnel have evolved over the years. Emergency management personnel are often required to be in the danger zone during emergencies. There are several examples of personnel who have been seriously injured in the line of duty. This can end careers prematurely and even shorten life spans.

SOLUTION: Amend Iowa Code to extend the Iowa Public Employees Retirement System (IPERS) protected occupation status to emergency management personnel.

Juvenile Detention

PROBLEM: In 1974, the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) bill was passed. One section of this bill was dedicated to removing juveniles from adult jails across the U.S. The State of Iowa pushed the counties to establish juvenile detention centers for the increased safety of this population. As a part of this push, the State of Iowa offered to share the cost with the counties up to 50%. In addition, Iowa Code §232.142 was established to set the state reimbursement rules. Iowa Administrative Code 441-167 defines the program in more detail. The fund of money being used to pay this is solely funded by the Iowa Department of Transportation fines for the reinstatement of driver's licenses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this fund collection was down over \$2 million.

SOLUTION: The legislature should appropriate additional funding to bring the partnership in this service to 50% on an annual basis. In FY21, the amount paid by the state only totaled 8.7%. Counties paid 91.3% of the cost of this service. The state amount of 8.7% is a small fraction for a vital service. As a result, this has created an unfunded mandate for all of Iowa's counties. To deal with the immediate shortfall brought on by the pandemic, we strongly encourage the use of American Rescue Plan Act funding to address this need.

Local Public Health as an Essential Service (LPC Recommended Top Priority)

PROBLEM: Iowa Code Chapter 137 outlines the requirements for the provision of local public health in each county in the state of Iowa, but funding for this requirement is not mentioned. Currently, this has resulted in each local public health agency being held to different expectations and funding levels. There is no consistency from agency to agency, which hinders the creation of a strong public health infrastructure.

SOLUTION: Amend Iowa Code Chapter 137, Local Boards of Health, to include language to outline funding levels and source of funding. Funding language currently found in Iowa Code Chapter 80, Local Public Health Services, would then need to be modified to allow the local agency to determine the services necessary for expending these funds.

Mental Health and Disability Services

PROBLEM: With the historic change in how mental health and disability services (MH/DS) are funded in SF 619, there remains a need to make sure there are safeguards in place to allow for the continuity of these essential services for all Iowans.

SOLUTION: As we move through the transition to funding MH/DS services to the State of Iowa, ISAC supports the state addressing the following issues either through legislation or administrative rule:

1. With the carry-forward balance restrictions being reduced to 5% after FY 2023 in SF 619, ISAC supports an increase to at least 10% to maintain timely payment to providers should the state fall behind in their quarterly payments to regions.
2. Governance board membership should be maintained as is or be equal in ratio to the number of supervisor/non-supervisor members to continue to see that there is local accountability in the delivery of these services

Nonresident Driver's License Issuance/Renewal

PROBLEM: Under current law, an individual can receive an initial issuance or renewal of a driver's license or nonoperator's identification card in any county. Some counties see a large number of out-of-county individuals receiving these services in their county. This is especially true in smaller population counties neighboring larger population counties, because of shorter wait times and logistics. Because the fees retained by the county does not cover the cost of providing this state service at the local level, property taxes subsidize it. In some counties, out-of-county residents constitute a large portion, or even a majority, of the customers for this service and the home county property taxpayers are subsidizing it.

SOLUTION: Amend Iowa Code §321M to authorize a county to charge a convenience fee of \$10 for the issuance of an initial or renewal driver's license or nonoperator's identification card for individuals that are neither a resident nor property taxpayer in the county of issuance.

Parcel Splits and Combinations

PROBLEM: Under current law there is no requirement for property taxes and assessments to be paid in full prior to splitting or combining parcels. Issues arise when there are unpaid property taxes, unredeemed tax sale certificates, or outstanding drainage or special assessments because the financial liability is tied to a parcel that may no longer exist. It is difficult to administer collection when the nature of the property and the owner changes.

SOLUTION: Amend Iowa Code to require property taxes and assessments be paid up prior to any splitting or combining of parcels.

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.

Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Funding

PROBLEM: The Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Program is consistently underfunded by the state legislature. This program invests in the enhancement and protection of the state's natural and cultural resources. The program impacts: Conservation Education, Roadside Vegetation, Historical Resources, Public Land Management, City Parks & Open Spaces, Soil & Water Enhancements, County Conservation Boards and State Open Spaces. The diverse impact of REAP is what makes it such a far-reaching and popular program. All groups in the REAP Alliance firmly reject any changes to the REAP distribution formula. REAP is the only state program which provides annual funding to enhance efforts of County Conservation Boards. The program is scheduled to sunset in 2026.

SOLUTION: ISAC supports full funding of REAP through the Natural Resource & Outdoor Trust Fund. An increase in Iowa's sales tax automatically fully funds REAP, now and into the future. The fallback solution is to fully fund the program through gaming receipts as originally intended and extend the sunset for at least another 10 years (2036).

Trade Name Filing

PROBLEM: Under current law, only a sole-proprietorship or partnership is required to register for a trade name with the county recorder when necessary. Recorders are seeing an influx of domestic and foreign entities registering for trade names for various reasons, including to meet the requirements to register to bid at an annual tax sale. The process would be more efficient and provide more transparency if these entities registered with the Office of the Secretary of State.

SOLUTION: Amend Iowa Code §547.1 to require entities organized, incorporated, or authorized to do business in this state as a limited partnership, limited liability company, corporation, professional corporation, cooperative or cooperative association, or a nonprofit corporation to register with the Office of the Secretary of State.

Unfunded County Mandates for Communicable Disease Mitigation

PROBLEM: Iowa Code dictates that counties are responsible for expenses incurred when an individual is in isolation. The expenses could be used for housing, food, medical, and any other expenses that are needed while in isolation. Isolation times vary depending on the disease as Tuberculosis could be six weeks along with Monkey Pox which is three weeks along with other diseases. This has placed an unfair financial burden on Iowa counties as this has not historically been an expense in public health budgets and the state of Iowa incurs no expense.

SOLUTION: Amend Iowa Code to direct that if the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services issues an isolation order, that the state cover the expenses associated with the conduct of that order.

Veteran Service Officer Education/Training Fund

PROBLEM: Counties are required to employ a nationally accredited county veteran service officer (VSO), which requires not only initial training and testing, but continuing education requirements to maintain the accreditation. The annual appropriation to each county commission of veteran affairs for services for veterans may not be sufficient to cover national training needed to maintain accreditation or the commission may choose other priorities for those funds.

SOLUTION: Increase the annual appropriation to the county commissions of veteran services by \$3,000 per county to be used specifically for national training and related expenses for VSOs and appropriate staff.

Zoning Commission/Board of Adjustment Membership

PROBLEM: Legislation enacted in 2020 limited membership on county zoning commissions and boards of adjustment to individuals living in the area regulated by the county zoning ordinance. This has led to difficulty in finding replacements and filling vacancies on these important, citizen-driven boards and commissions.

SOLUTION: The legislature should revert back to previous law requiring a majority of the members of the zoning commission and board of adjustment reside in the unincorporated area of the county, or absent that reversion, should allow for the appointment of a member residing within the county but not in the area regulated by the zoning ordinance if the board of supervisors has made a good faith effort to appoint a qualified person for a period of three months but has been unable to make a compliant appointment. Individuals owning property in but not residing in the area regulated by a zoning ordinance should be eligible to serve on the zoning commission or board of adjustment.

2023 ISAC Legislative Policy Statements

Policy Statements – County Administration and Organization

Absentee Ballot Commencement Date

Prior to passage of House File 516, the county commissioner of elections was required to begin mailing absentee ballots to those who had requested one “as soon as ballots were printed.” In addition, the commissioner of elections was required to provide access to absentee voting in person at the commissioner’s office also when the ballots were made available but no sooner than 40 days prior to the election. After HF 516, both processes now cannot begin until 29 days prior to the election. With an increased number of voters utilizing the absentee process, shortening the number of days that voters have access to absentee ballots is not only problematic to the voter, it is also problematic for the commissioner’s office and staff. ISAC supports the reinstatement of the language in Iowa Code prior to HF 516 that would allow county commissioners of elections the ability to mail absentee ballots after they are available and to allow absentee ballot voting at the commissioner’s office 40 days prior to the election.

Assessor as an Appointed Office

The assessor is charged with many administrative and statutory duties. The primary duty and responsibility of the assessor is to make certain all locally assessed real property within the jurisdiction is assessed at market value except where the law provides otherwise. Each assessor is required to pass an initial examination, as well as a program of continuing education and testing. In addition to these standards, assessors are subject to a system of checks and balances including state oversight by the Department of Revenue, an equalization process to ensure assessment levels are within guidelines established by law, and a clear process for property owners to protest the assessed value. With these requirements in place for duties, education, and oversight, and the professional nature of the office, ISAC supports maintaining the appointment and governance of the assessor by the conference board and opposes politicizing the position by making it an elected position or subject to a retention vote.

County Courthouse Furniture and Equipment Funding

As we have seen county courthouse infrastructure deteriorating in Iowa, some counties have looked to bond referendums to address improvements to their court facilities. Iowa Code §602.1303 mandates that counties shall provide courtrooms, offices, and other physical facilities which, in the judgement of the board of supervisors are suitable for the district court, and the counties bear those financial costs that are associated. All additional court expense responsibilities are outlined in Iowa Code §§602.1302 and 602.11101 which require the furnishings, supplies and equipment for the judicial officers and court staff to be paid from funds appropriated by the Iowa General Assembly for the Iowa Judicial Branch. As some counties have recently passed referendums for court renovations and have met their financial obligations according to Iowa Code, the Iowa General Assembly has failed to appropriate the funding the Iowa Judicial Branch needs for the furniture and equipment of the courts. This lack of funding will result in increased construction costs and serious delays in the opening of these facilities whose improvements were approved by over a 60% majority of the residents of the county. ISAC supports the necessary state funding to the Iowa Judicial Branch for the furniture and equipment needs of Iowa courts as mandated in Iowa Code.

County Home Rule and Local Governance

In 1978, the County Home Rule Amendment was added to the Iowa Constitution, giving counties home rule power and authority to address local affairs and to determine governmental structures. 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.

County Official Compensation

Factors outside the control of compensation boards, department governance boards, and boards of supervisors often affect the duties and responsibilities of county officials and departments, with little consideration given when compensation packages are decided. Response to a global pandemic and continually changing election laws are two examples of these factors. ISAC supports more thoughtful consideration of the changing duties and responsibilities of each elected and appointed official and county department when recommending and approving compensation packages. This review should be fair and equitable to all parties, provide a realistic wage reflecting current duties, and meet the ever increasing need to attract and retain county employees.

County Technical Clean-Up Legislation

County officials, including auditors, recorders, and treasurers, occasionally have technical concerns with Iowa Code. Those who work in these areas annually identify technical improvements that can be made to allow their offices to operate more efficiently for both the customers and those who are working in and managing those offices. ISAC supports the efforts of each of these affiliates in bringing forward technical bills to address noncontroversial improvements.

Electronic Meetings

The state open meetings law allows a government body to conduct a meeting by electronic means only in circumstances where such a meeting in person is impossible or impractical. The term impractical is open to interpretation and has produced differing legal opinions given various circumstances. Furthermore, counties now use electronic meeting technology not contemplated by current law that often allows more access and transparency than fully in-person meetings. ISAC supports striking “only in circumstances where such a meeting in person is impossible or impractical” from Iowa Code §21.8(1). This authorizes a governmental body to conduct business by electronic means regularly or on occasion, at its discretion, so long as all other open meetings requirements are met.

Election Hours

As a result of recent issues affecting the conduct of elections, the need to provide more timely election results, and the continuing challenge to attract and retain poll election officials, ISAC supports the following:

- Allow polls to open at 12:00 pm (noon) for special elections.
- Allow polls to open at 12:00 pm (noon) for city/school elections for cities with populations under 3,500.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data is playing an increasingly important role at all levels of government. The implementation and maintenance of an up-to-date system is vital to many county functions and is necessary to meet the increasing demands from the public and government agencies for spatial information. ISAC supports the collaborative efforts among multiple government agencies that are engaged in the Iowa Geospatial Infrastructure program. ISAC encourages continuing efforts toward building partnerships and the identification of funding for sustainable and integrated GIS at all levels of government.

An accurate census count is important to both states and local jurisdictions for many reasons, including electoral representation and federal assistance programs. The address information provided by the Census Bureau is not comprehensive so accurate address maintenance falls to local jurisdictions. GIS is critical in ensuring local address lists are up-to-date, and as a result, the information provided to the Census Bureau is as accurate and complete as possible. In the case of federal assistance programs, it is estimated that just a 1% undercount in the 2010 Census would lead to over \$38 million less in Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP)-based program funds to the state of Iowa. ISAC supports the establishment of a state-funded grant program or annual state allocation to local jurisdictions for GIS programs undertaking address maintenance efforts.

Guardian Ad Litem Fees

Iowa Code §915.37 provides that a prosecuting witness who is under age 18 in sexual abuse cases is entitled to have a guardian ad litem appointed to represent the child’s interest in the case. This is an important role as child witnesses as otherwise the child does not have an advocate within the court proceedings. In 2002 the Iowa Supreme Court found that the indigent defense fund for the state should pay for these guardian ad litem fees. See *State Pub. Defender v. Iowa District Court for Wapello County*, 644 N.W.2d 354 (Iowa 2002). Then, in 2003 the legislature amended Iowa Code §815.11 to specifically exclude payments pursuant to Iowa Code Chapter 915. This has left counties in the position of having to pay for legal fees that should be paid by the state. Striking the exclusion of Section 915 from Iowa Code §815.11 would require the state once again pays for guardian ad litem fees for child witnesses in sexual assault cases.

Iowa Public Employees’ Retirement System (IPERS)

ISAC supports a sustainable, cost-efficient retirement plan for county employees that serves to attract and retain high quality employees and provides them with a stable and secure income in retirement. The Iowa Public Employees’ Retirement System

(IPERS) provides such a plan to county employees and retirees. Any legislative change to IPERS should come only following thoughtful deliberation and engagement with ISAC as well as county employers and employees. ISAC opposes any dramatic changes to the contribution or benefit structure that would affect past, present, or future county employees.

Maintaining County Elected Officials

Having a full slate of local elected officials – and keeping them accountable every step of the way – is the best guarantee of a government that is fiscally responsible yet visionary, and always ready and able to promote the best that counties have to offer. Autonomous elected officials have the incentive to strategize with peers to improve services to the public, to organize offices in the most efficient manner in providing good value to constituents, and to budget wisely in a very public setting. Local elected officials know their customers and business partners – both public and private – and understand how legislation affects all aspects of their offices. County elected officials are accessible and can be contacted by the public at any time for discussions and questions. They work collaboratively with each other to provide a comprehensive planning process to guarantee the effective use of our tax dollars. Standing for election every four years gives the public the opportunity to scrutinize choices and accomplishments. ISAC supports elected officials representing county government.

Composition of the Conference Board

The conference board consists of elected officials from the three largest property taxing jurisdictions (schools, cities, and counties) and is responsible for appointing the assessor, approving the assessor's budget, and acting as a governance board for the assessor. Members of the conference board represent the property taxpayers of their respective jurisdictions and the voters that elected them in fulfilling these duties. Adding individual property owners as voting members of the conference board, especially if they make up their own voting unit equal to that of the combined vote of all representatives from the taxing entities, is contrary to the roles and responsibilities of the conference board as an independent governance board without personal interest and contributes to the politicization of the office of the assessor. ISAC supports limiting conference board membership to representatives from the county, cities, and school districts.

Recent economic forces causing more school consolidations have caused the schools, as one of three major local levying authorities, to lose their conference board voting authority when the county has only one high school district. The Attorney General has opined that a single high school district would not constitute a voting unit for purposes of the conference board. ISAC supports changes to Iowa Code §441.2 that would allow the appointment of a second school board representative from the same district if there is only one high school district in the county.

Public Bidding of In-House Projects

Some counties and cities have the capacity to complete public improvement projects in-house that cost over the threshold amount for competitive bids or quotations. Iowa Code requires that for vertical infrastructure projects over \$145,000 a county must obtain competitive quotes, and county projects must be put out for public bid if a horizontal project is over \$120,000 or a vertical project is over \$196,000. If a county intends to complete a public improvement project in-house, the public bidding and quotation processes waste the time and resources of both the county and any private companies that submit a bid or quotation on the project. ISAC supports adding an exemption from the public bidding and quotation requirements of Iowa Code §§26.3 and 26.14 for local governments that have projects over the applicable threshold amounts that will be completed by in-house staff, in order to eliminate this inefficient use of local tax resources.

Public Sector Collective Bargaining

ISAC supports a Public Employment Relations Act that provides for a balance of management decision making and fairness to both the employees and taxpayers. ISAC would support a careful review and study of the current law and an open process to make any necessary revisions.

Registration/Title/Lien Release Across County Lines

Under current law a lien on off-road vehicles, vessels, and snowmobiles can only be released in the county in which they are registered. In the case of a sale, the registration by the new owner is often delayed while the paperwork is sent back to the seller's county recorder. ISAC supports allowing any county recorder to release the lien on any off-road vehicle, vessel, or snowmobile in the Recreational Vehicle and Vessel Registration System (RVVRS) regardless of the county of origin.

Retaining the Compensation Board

After years of unfair and discriminatory methods of setting the compensation for elected county officials, the Legislature enacted a law that is fair to the elected officers and to the public. The present law, which allows seven county residents to review and set the

compensation for elected officials with a built-in veto remedy by county supervisors, provides the proper checks and balances for the protection of the public and for the fair and equitable treatment of elected officials.

Support for County E-Government Services and Issues

Leadership at all levels of government should support and encourage open communication standards that will allow access to data and information. ISAC encourages transparent integration of e-government services at every level of government, while still respecting the boundaries and philosophies of policy makers and leveraging the capabilities of and investment in existing systems and infrastructure including electronic and credit card payment methods. Open communication standards will promote new and creative ways to use the services currently available and make delivery and integration of new services easier and more cost effective. Open communication standards offer pioneering agencies the freedom to choose appropriate support hardware, software, and service providers while maintaining connectivity with others. ISAC urges the Legislature to continue supporting counties in their endeavors to provide services electronically and encourages public/private partnerships.

Townships and Township Trustees

There have been ongoing discussions of the role that townships and township trustees play in Iowa's governmental system. It is important for local government to be as efficient and streamlined as possible. County officials realize that townships deliver needed services to Iowa's rural citizens, a fact often overlooked by critics. Therefore, any discussion of eliminating township government should include representatives of counties, including auditors, and other units of local government. One solution is to fund an interim committee of legislators, county officials, and township officials to study the duties and responsibilities of township officials and to determine if there is a more efficient and uniform method to accomplish the same tasks.

User Fees

There are a number of services that counties provide to the public that are subsidized by property taxes because the fees charged to the customers are not adequate to pay for the service. Many fees have not been adjusted in many years, and the increased expenses are funded by the property taxpayer. ISAC supports modernizing fees to cover the cost of providing the service in order to reduce the burden on property taxpayers. In the case of state services provided by the county, ISAC supports modernizing fees or adjusting the amount retained by the county or a combination of both.

Vehicle Registration Fee Refunds

If a vehicle owner trades vehicles and is owed a credit for the unused portion of the annual registration fee, the credit is not extended to the new vehicle if it is less than \$10. The unused portion of the registration fee rightfully belongs to the vehicle owner and should be credited to the registration fee due for the new vehicle regardless of the dollar amount. ISAC supports the removal of language disallowing unused registration fees under \$10 to be credited.

Writing Fees

Iowa Code directs the county recorder to collect a \$1.25 writing fee each for the registration, title, and application of a lien on a vessel. Iowa Code directs the county recorder to collect the same writing fee for the registration of snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles, but the code is silent on writing fees for titles and application of a lien on these two types of vehicles. This omission and inconsistency in Iowa Code has caused confusion among dealers when they send in the fees, which can result in overpayment or underpayment leading to delays in the registration and/or titling of the vehicle. It also causes the county recorder to do the same work for different fees depending on the vehicle. ISAC supports aligning the fee structure for each privilege by allowing the county recorder to collect \$1.25 for each registration, title, and application of a lien for these vehicles.

Policy Statements – Environment and Public Health

Bottle Bill

In 2022, the Iowa Legislature and Governor made changes to Iowa's Bottle Bill. Among the changes, the portion of deposit fees collected going to redemption centers was doubled to two cents, and some of the requirements for grocers to take back containers were reduced. The deposit on containers continues to be five cents. This has not changed since the law was enacted in 1979, even though a nickel in 1979 translates to closer to a penny in 2022, providing much less of an incentive for people to return containers for recycling. Also unchanged are the types of containers that require a deposit – many of today's beverages have no deposit. ISAC continues to support a working group of interested parties be convened periodically to examine the long-term viability of the Bottle Bill.

Casino Smoking Ban

The Iowa Smoke Free Air Act states that "environmental tobacco causes and exacerbates disease in nonsmoking adults and children sufficient to warrant measures that regulate smoking in public places, places of employment, and outdoor areas in order to protect

public health and the health of the employees.” Despite this statement, the Smoke Free Air Act specifically exempts restrictions being placed on smoking in casinos. ISAC supports amending the Iowa Smoke Free Air Act to eliminate the casino exemption and allow casino employees the same workplace protections as all other Iowans.

County Infractions

County zoning violations are handled through the courts under Iowa Code §331.307(9). This section allows counties to “abate or correct the violation” and the court to enter the cost to clean up the property as “a personal judgment against the defendant or assessed against the property where the violation occurred, or both.” If the offending party does not pay for the cost of cleanup or does not pay to relieve the lien from the property, there is no way to force a timely payment of the debt owed to the county. ISAC supports amending Iowa Code §331.307(9) to mirror Iowa Code §331.384 that relates to public health and safety hazards to allow a county to correct a county zoning violation and assess the costs against the property for collection in the same manner as a property tax.

Energy Resources

ISAC supports Iowa’s agricultural producers, educational institutions, and industries in the research, development, and use of renewable fuels, such as E85 and biodiesel, and alternative energy resources, such as wind power, geothermal, and solar. Increasing the supply and quality of environmentally friendly renewable fuels and alternative energy resources will boost local industry and economic growth, reduce harmful emissions, provide a less costly fuel energy supply, and reduce dependence on foreign oil. This must be accomplished in a manner that weighs the benefits achieved against the local environmental impacts of such production. It is in the best long-term interest of the taxpayer for local governments to develop the capacity to conserve energy through improved practices in technology. ISAC supports providing state and federal grants and other funding, such as tax credits, to assist counties in this effort.

Indemnity Fund

The indemnity fund, established to pay for cleanup of abandoned Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) by local governments, should be left intact and not be subjected to use for any other purpose unrelated to abandoned CAFOs. Many buildings are reaching the age at which they are likely to be abandoned, making this issue more urgent. ISAC also supports an indemnity fund for wind energy conversion property to ensure proper site and property clean up and disposal in the case of abandonment.

Maintenance of Public Health Laws and Regulations

Public health laws and regulations are intended to protect the health of all Iowans. Such laws and regulations, therefore, must be based on sound scientific principles. State and local boards of health are established to provide unbiased direction on important matters of public health. Proposals to change public health protections in the law should be in response to new evidence based on sound scientific principles of disease prevention and environmental protection. Policy changes should be accompanied by an assessment from the State Board of Health and organizations representing local public health agencies. Public health policy changes should undergo a thorough review by those charged with implementing the policies.

Nicotine

ISAC supports efforts to reduce the initiation and decrease the use of tobacco products in all its forms, including electronic cigarettes and vapor products, to address the long-term health costs created by the use of these products. Strategies include increasing and equalizing taxes on all nicotine products, and prohibiting the sale to, possession by, and use of all nicotine products by minors.

Radon

Radon is a radioactive gas that is invisible, odorless, and tasteless. It is found in soil and rock that comes from the breakdown of uranium. Every county in Iowa is in the zone with the highest potential radon levels and Iowa leads the nation with over 70% of homes above the recommended action level. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States and the leading cause of lung cancer in non-smokers. Simple, inexpensive venting techniques used during construction of a new home can safely remove the radon gas and help with other indoor air quality issues (mold, mildew, etc.). ISAC supports Radon Resistant New Construction in all newly built homes as well as a time-of-transfer radon test in all homes.

Raw Milk

Raw milk accounts for approximately 1%-3% of milk sales in the United States, while it is responsible for 97-99% of all milk-related outbreaks. According to the CDC, outbreaks related to raw milk occur more than 150 times more often than outbreaks associated with pasteurized milk. To protect the health of Iowans, the Legislature should continue to firmly support pasteurization of milk which kills any disease-causing bacteria.

Unsewered Community Revolving Loan Fund

Many small communities in the state are considered to be “unsewered” or “undersewered.” Most of these communities either have inadequate centralized waste collection and treatment systems or a collection of private systems that may not be adequate to meet the needs of the community. Many of these small systems or collections of systems illegally discharge untreated human waste. Most of the unsewered communities are incorporated towns of less than 500 persons, unincorporated villages under county control, or pockets of small subdivisions scattered throughout a county. In 2009, HF 468 created the unsewered community revolving loan fund program to provide no-interest loans for the purpose of installing sewage disposal systems in small cities and unincorporated subdivisions. ISAC supports funding this program with a combination of state and federal money.

Policy Statements – Human Services

Advance Psychiatric Directives

ISAC supports legislation that gives advance psychiatric directives the same recognition as a durable power of attorney. Advance directives can ensure treatment without having to use intervention of the courts through the civil commitment process. However, while the similar durable power of attorney is readily accepted for somatic care, advance psychiatric directives are not generally recognized in Iowa.

Substance Abuse Treatment

ISAC supports the appropriation of sufficient state funds to counties if required by the state to make services available for evaluation, medical and social detoxification, and prescribed outpatient, residential, or inpatient treatment, including for Iowans in need of substance abuse treatment, whether voluntary or involuntary.

Definition of Veteran for State Benefits

While the United States Department of Veterans Affairs recognizes the service of commissioned officers of the Public Health Service, Environmental Science Services Administration, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Coast and Geodetic Survey Administration, they are not considered veterans under Iowa Code and do not receive the same benefits as veterans of the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard. ISAC supports amending the definition of “veteran” in Iowa Code Chapter 35 to include commissioned officers of the Public Health Service, Environmental Science Services Administration, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Coast and Geodetic Survey Administration.

Policy Statements – Land Use and Rural Affairs

Agricultural Building Value

The value generated by agricultural buildings is automatically subtracted from the value generated for agricultural land by the productivity formula. The result is that the construction of any new agricultural building adds zero net value to Iowa’s property tax base. This situation serves as a disincentive to agricultural economic development for county governments because large-scale livestock operations impose significant additional costs on counties, such as road maintenance, without expanding the tax base to help pay for those costs. ISAC supports legislation that values agricultural buildings at their replacement cost new less depreciation and then adjusted by the appropriate agricultural factor with the value being in addition to the valuation determined for agricultural land.

Agricultural Exemption from Zoning and Building Codes

The exemption for farmhouses and buildings from county building codes and zoning regulations needs to be clarified. Legislative amendments (1963) and an opinion from the Attorney General’s Office (#97-1-1) have made it virtually impossible for counties to apply objective standards in uniformly and consistently administering the exemption. Because of the changing nature of agriculture, this state-mandated exemption will only become more difficult for counties to administer. When counties adopt building and zoning regulations, the public health, safety, and welfare benefits of those regulations should be applied to all households regardless of the owner’s occupation. The exemption also prevents a county from enforcing setback requirements on farm buildings. Buildings too close to the road have a significant impact on drifting snow, road maintenance, and traffic safety. ISAC supports legislation that eliminates the farmhouse building exemption and the farm buildings setback exemption.

Cell Tower Siting

Counties must comply with federal due process limitations and other federal agency regulations relating to cell tower siting. State level legislation adopted in 2015 (HF 655) circumvents local control in several ways and threatens the authority of county zoning ordinances and local decision making. ISAC supports the statutory repeal of these changes that are set to occur on July 1, 2025. Furthermore, ISAC opposes additional legislation that does any of the following:

- significantly changes, to the detriment of local control, industry or process terms already established or under consideration by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) or another federal agency;
- further limits the authority of local governments and decision-making bodies when considering an application for wireless infrastructure siting. This includes limiting what can be considered, what information and documentation can be requested, and the grounds for approval or denial;
- puts in place a more stringent or burdensome timetable and deadline than the FCC “shot clock” declaratory order for consideration and action on an application or the timelines set forth in HF 655; or
- circumvents local control over policy or land use decisions or supersedes local zoning ordinances.

Conservation Lands

Iowa is ranked near-bottom among the states in the percentage of public land available to its citizens. The lack of public lands reduces outdoor recreation opportunities, water quality, and protection of natural resources, all of which are of great importance to Iowans’ health and quality of life. Equally important are the jobs associated with our public lands – jobs that are labor-intensive and vital to rural Iowa communities, including tourism, rural energy development and watershed management. In addition, when people travel to recreate on public lands, they spend money in neighboring towns, which are generally rural communities that depend on this income. ISAC supports the retention and acquisition of public lands in Iowa.

Chronic Wasting Disease

Confined animals are more susceptible to transmitting disease due to their close contact and from being moved from site-to-site. Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has been found in several captive deer herds and in the wild population in Iowa. ISAC supports regulations or prohibitions on private deer herds which would reduce the threat of CWD to the wild deer population.

Forest Reserve Property Tax Exemption

ISAC understands the value of the wildlife habitat, water quality, soil preservation, and outdoor recreation provided by property tax exemption for forest reserve land but recognizes there are abuses and misuses of the program and enrolled land still receives public services such as road maintenance and emergency services. ISAC supports exploring: a partial rollback of the exemption or a payment-in-lieu-of-taxes; consideration of moving the minimum acres for qualification from two to five acres; increased tools for enforcement of program rules; and reforming the recapture tax provisions to place responsibility with the seller.

Flood and Erosion Control Levy

A county board of supervisors may levy a tax not to exceed six and three-fourths cents per thousand of assessed value to be used for certain flood and erosion control activities. At the time the authority was granted, Soil and Water Conservation Districts consisted only of agricultural land and the levy was limited to agricultural land. With the districts now consisting of all land within a county, the levying authority should be updated to reflect the change and allow the levy to apply to all real property. ISAC supports changes to Iowa Code §161E.9 that would allow a tax to be levied for flood and erosion control on all real property.

Flood Plain Management Policy

ISAC supports working with local, state, and federal government agencies to fund efforts to accurately map all flood hazard areas in the state through the use of hydrologic models or other means that will determine future flood elevations and assist the state in the development of a plan to prevent future flood occurrences. The plan should provide for:

- funding to support the continuing development of more accurate and updated Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) and Flood Boundary and Floodway maps. Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) or hydrological studies should be used to develop elevation data with a maximum of two-foot contours in order to assist counties and cities in identifying and delineating flood-prone and floodway areas. In order to be recognized as the legal floodplain and floodway maps, the new maps created by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) should be adopted by the state and local municipalities;
- funding and technical assistance in obtaining 100-year and 500-year elevations for all FIRM maps to assist homeowners, insurance agencies, and zoning officials in identifying safe areas and elevations for building;
- funding to counties and cities to relocate structures in floodway areas and areas of severe and highly repetitive flooding, and the development of low impact uses in these areas, such as parks and recreation facilities;
- requiring a county floodplain ordinance that orders detailed hydrologic and hydraulic studies and that has guidelines for when and where these studies are needed prior to construction. The ordinance should require the property owner or developer to show the up and downstream effects of filling or development on existing buildings and infrastructure. It should also provide statewide penalties for noncompliance. The ordinance should serve as the state standard that a county or city must adopt, while allowing the county or city to adopt a stricter version;
- statewide solutions, including standards for watershed management, that will mitigate the effects of filling or developing in a floodplain area;

- technical assistance to counties and cities that currently do not have trained staff to administer floodplain management ordinances or watershed management requirements;
- reviewing, updating, and developing additional statewide protocols, through Homeland Security, National Resources Conservation Services, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Army Corps of Engineers, for counties and cities to follow before, during and after flooding to provide the maximum protection to the public;
- identification and acquisition, through easements or other means, of environmentally sensitive land by the DNR or other conservation agency; and
- funding and technical assistance to utilize urban and rural best management practices in the design, construction, and maintenance of projects that increase filtration of storm water, reduce water runoff, and collect and hold runoff in upstream drainage areas.

Funding of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Iowa counties rely heavily on many important programs administered through the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS), and other state conservation agencies. In recent years, drastic cuts to the DNR have led to decreases in staff and are impacting services such as: administration of grant programs that directly and indirectly affect counties; some shared staffing projects with counties; partnership projects with conservation boards for land management; AmeriCorps volunteer services projects; and more. In addition, maintenance and upgrades of state parks and facilities are in jeopardy. These important attractions contribute to economic activity in many counties, and in some rural counties may be a major economic driver. Per capita state spending on parks and conservation programs now is at or near the bottom in the nation. ISAC supports state efforts to maintain or increase funding to the Iowa DNR and is against the diversion of current program funding such as from REAP for other DNR services.

Grants to Counties Program

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Grants to Counties (GTC) program was created in 1987 with support from the agriculture community to provide funds to county environmental health agencies to test and rehabilitate wells and to plug abandoned wells at a significant rate in order to protect groundwater resources. Abandoned wells are still prominent in Iowa and present a serious threat to groundwater quality. The funds for the program come from a tax on all pesticides (commercial, ag, and residential). The Legislature should continue to provide authority to DHHS to reallocate unused funds to all counties during the next grant cycle and to reallocate funds during the current grant cycle to counties needing additional funds for GTC.

Invasive Species

Iowa's native flora and fauna are under attack by invasive plants, animals, and insects. Non-native species threaten Iowa's ecosystems and have the potential to seriously impact Iowa's biologic diversity and economy. These threats have been increasing in recent decades, and the number of species of great concern has been growing. State government should support the planting and protection of native species and strongly discourage non-native species. The Legislature should provide adequate funding for programs that monitor, regulate, and control invasive species in our lands and waters.

Lake Restoration

The Lake Restoration Program was designed to improve water quality in many of Iowa's public waters. The program was based on a long-term ranking system that provides adequate funding over multiple years to address Iowa's most popular lakes. Current funding for the state's Lake and River Restoration Programs is in jeopardy of being significantly reduced or eliminated. One hundred and twenty-seven of Iowa's principal public lakes were ranked for lake restoration suitability based upon a number of socio-economic, water quality, and watershed factors. The ranking process resulted in a priority list of 35 lakes. In order to address the issues identified in these watersheds and to be able to adequately plan for these multi-year, multi-jurisdictional, and multi-funding source projects, the Lake Restoration Program needs stable funding of approximately \$8.6 million per year for at least a 10-year period.

Land Banks

ISAC supports enabling legislation to authorize the creation of municipal land bank entities. Land banks have proven effective in other states in decreasing the number of blighted and abandoned properties in the region, increasing the access to affordable housing, increasing access to buildings and land to redevelop, increasing tax revenues, and turning community liabilities into assets. Enabling legislation should create a framework to provide the entity with the special powers necessary to have an impact in Iowa and to provide a basis for city and county powers, taxation of properties, and tax sales.

Limiting Additional Exemptions to County Zoning

Several attempts have been made to expand the types of uses that would qualify for exemptions to county zoning regulations. Creating a laundry list of exempt land uses undermines the basic intent of county planning and zoning, weakens local home rule

authority, and sends a signal that local public policy can be undermined by special interest groups. ISAC opposes attempts to expand the types of land uses exempt from county zoning.

Master Matrix Updates

It has become apparent that there are some lands that are not adequately protected by current setback requirements for confinement feeding operations. Some loopholes allow these operations to bypass intended setback distances from homes and public use areas. In addition, the current scoring structure allows developers of confinement feeding operations to skip certain components of the master matrix that may be important to adjacent property owners, other citizens, or the county board of supervisors if they have sufficient points in other areas. ISAC supports a careful review and study of the master matrix and an open process to make any necessary revisions. The Legislature should address deficiencies in the master matrix. At minimum, legislation should:

- direct the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to review the master matrix program with input from ISAC and the Iowa State Association of County Supervisors, among other stakeholders, to determine if separation distances are adequate to protect human health, the environment, property values, and community quality of life;
- afford county and city-owned wetlands the same special setback protections as state and federally owned “designated wetlands,” as found in Iowa Code §459.102(22);
- designate waterfowl production areas, whether managed by DNR or not, as “public use areas” for applying setbacks;
- amend Iowa Code §459.205(1) so that it reads as follows: “A confinement feeding operation structure, if the structure is part of a confinement feeding operation that qualifies as a small animal feeding operation. However, this subsection shall not apply to the following: a) If the confinement feeding operation structure is an unformed manure storage structure; b) If the small animal feeding operation is no longer a small animal feeding operation due to common ownership or management of an adjacent confinement feeding operation as provided in Iowa Code §459.201”;
- allow the county to adopt a local ordinance to require a minimum number of points in designated areas of the master matrix deemed important to the county in addition to the minimum overall score; and
- authorize an administrative fee to be charged for evaluation of siting and review of the master matrix.

Counties that have adopted a Construction Evaluation Resolution (CER) are required by Iowa Code to perform certain duties within a specified time frame in their review of Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations that are subject to the Master Matrix. Counties expend significant staff time and resources in this review yet are not authorized to collect an application fee to offset those costs, so the cost of the review process is subsidized by all county taxpayers. Furthermore, if an applicant fails to earn the required points on the Master Matrix they will likely withdraw the application and re-submit when the deficiencies have been addressed, but they have already used a significant amount of staff time and resources for the review. This could be resolved if counties were authorized to conduct a pre-application review in order to identify deficiencies that could be fixed prior to the formal submittal by the applicant. ISAC supports legislation that would authorize a Master Matrix review fee to be collected and that would implement an optional pre-application review of an applicant’s Master Matrix score prior to formal submittal.

Rivers Program

The Rivers Programs at the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is involved with not only recreation, but preservation, conservation, restoration, low head dam modification, and stream bank stabilization. Two priorities of the program include water trail development and dam mitigation. Iowa is blessed with a variety of rivers, creeks, and lakes offering a number of different types of experiences for beginner to expert paddler. As communities continue to develop and promote water recreation on Iowa's 18,000 miles of navigable streams, it is extremely important to fund the Rivers Program. ISAC applauds the important work of the DNR Rivers Program and strongly supports funding the program to provide Iowa communities the tools to encourage safe and responsible use of Iowa's river resources.

Rural Development

In order to restore and sustain rural viability in Iowa, five important issues should be considered by lawmakers:

Renewable Energy Development

On-site, renewable energy generation can provide significant rural development opportunities to the generator and the public through personal and community energy independence, relief from high prices, increased property values, reduced pressure on the local energy grid, and diversification of the state’s energy supply with a clean alternative. ISAC supports legislation that will result in an improved political, regulatory, and financial environment for this type of rural development.

Health Care

Efforts should continue by state and local governments, non-profit advocacy groups, and commercial interests to keep and attract new mental health, medical, and health care professionals in rural Iowa. Current college tuition reimbursement programs to assist doctors who decide to practice in rural Iowa should be expanded to include dentists, mental health professionals, and health care professionals.

Housing

Rural Iowa cannot experience a revival until people know that affordable housing, new or existing, for low to moderate-income families is available. The Iowa Enterprise Zone is an excellent program, but under existing law it does not work efficiently for the rural counties. The Enterprise Zone program needs to be changed to allow rural counties to cross "enterprise zones" for the purpose of constructing four or more speculation houses. Assisted living is also a key to the revival of rural Iowa, and additional state support is needed in this area. A partnership should be established between counties, cities, and the state to create a housing trust fund.

Water and Wastewater Programs

The quality of both groundwater and surface water affects public health, community economic development, and the attractiveness of Iowa as a place to live. Iowa's municipal water systems and rural water districts work to maintain quality drinking water for thousands of people. Water availability depends on aging water infrastructure, and water quality is affected by the way wastewater is handled. County public health programs have a responsibility to ensure the installation and maintenance of adequate septic systems. Towns, housing developments, and rural villages with inadequate systems may be required to install modern, central wastewater systems or updated septic systems for individual dwellings. Practical regulations and adequate funding are necessary to assure these systems are affordable and meet the needs of the community, thereby furthering a continued high degree of confidence in Iowa's water quality.

Broadband Internet Access for Rural Iowans

High-speed broadband internet service is not readily available in many parts of rural Iowa. Broadband access is required to grow existing and to attract new business and industry. It would also give schools, community colleges, and libraries better access to information and provide better communications. In addition, while e-government and e-commerce are gaining momentum, the infrastructure required to sustain their momentum is severely lacking. Iowa must invest in the infrastructure necessary to achieve the goal of 99.95% accessibility to broadband in all areas of the state, giving rural counties and their citizens access to the Internet at the same level as more densely populated areas. Broadband expansion must be achieved without inhibiting local control of decision making and zoning ordinances.

Waters of the U.S.

The federal Clean Water Act (CWA) controls and regulates discharges of pollutants into waters of the United States. Specifically, CWA prohibits the discharge of any pollutant from a point source into navigable waters unless a permit is obtained. ISAC opposes legislation and administrative rules that would broaden the scope of the waters subject to regulation by CWA. Defining man-made or man-altered ditches, such as drainage or roadside ditches and flood channels, as tributaries subject to CWA regulation would have a significantly detrimental impact on county governments, drainage districts, and the agriculture industry in Iowa.

Watershed Management Authorities

In 2010, Iowa lawmakers passed legislation authorizing the creation of Watershed Management Authorities. A Watershed Management Authority (WMA) is a mechanism for cities, counties, soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs), and stakeholders to cooperatively engage in watershed planning and management. The WMA is formed by a Chapter 28E Agreement by two or more eligible political subdivisions within a specific eight-digit hydrologic unit code watershed. A board of directors governs the WMA, which may undertake the following activities:

- assess and reduce flood risk;
- assess and improve water quality;
- monitor federal flood risk planning and activities;
- educate residents of the watershed regarding flood risks and water quality;
- allocate moneys made available to the Authority for purposes of water quality and flood mitigation; and
- while the driving motivation for WMA formation may be water quality improvement and/or flood risk reduction, there are multiple benefits to cooperating with other jurisdictions within a watershed:
 - conduct planning on a watershed scale, which has greater benefits for water quality improvement and flood risk reduction;
 - foster multi-jurisdictional partnership and cooperation;
 - leverage resources such as funding, technical expertise; and
 - Facilitate stakeholder involvement in watershed management.

ISAC supports this broad-based and multi-jurisdictional approach to watershed management in Iowa and supports funding WMAs and personnel.