

# LEGISLATIVE TIPS FROM IFAPA

This year Iowa faces a record budget shortfall. Iowa legislators will face a daunting task to try and provide services to so many in need with such limited funding. Children must remain a priority of our state. Children in the child welfare system are some of the most vulnerable children in Iowa. IFAPA will continue to work to be a voice for children and families, but we need your help.

In these tough financial times it is imperative that IFAPA members keep their legislators informed on the issues facing children in their care. Sharing specific information such as: how adoption subsidy has made a difference for your child; how a child has blossomed with the structure and consistency of foster care; how your family has been able to work with birth parents to return a child home; how a training taught you how to parent a difficult teen—all tell the story of the importance of funding for foster care and adoption programs.

Legislators want to hear from YOU, their constituents. They are there to address the needs of all Iowans, including the children in foster care and adoptive homes and the parents who care for them.

## This publication includes tips from IFAPA on:

- How to Speak to Your Legislators at the IFAPA Legislative Breakfast
- How to Effectively Contact & Communicate with Your Legislators
- How to Write an Effective Letter to Your Legislator

## Don't Know Your Legislators?

To find out who your legislators are and their mailing address, phone number and e-mail address, visit the Iowa Legislature website. It is very simple. Just type in your home address and it will list your federal and state legislators. [www.legis.state.ia.us/FindLeg/](http://www.legis.state.ia.us/FindLeg/)

## 2010 IFAPA Legislative Breakfast

**Tuesday, February 16**

7:00am - 9:00am

State Capitol Building  
Legislative Dining Rm  
Des Moines, IA

To attend, call IFAPA  
800-277-8145 ext. 4



Visit the IFAPA website  
at [www.ifapa.org](http://www.ifapa.org) to  
view legislative  
resources and news.

## How the Legislative Breakfast Works

Many families say they want to talk to policymakers about changes in the system, but they don't know where to start. How about the Legislative Breakfast? Here are some tips, so you will feel confident participating in this annual event.

All Iowa Senators and Representatives are invited to attend the IFAPA Legislative Breakfast, and we have repeatedly been told it is one of the best attended breakfasts at the Capitol! Policymakers want to meet you!

When you enter the Capitol, you will find IFAPA staff and other families outside the Legislative Dining Room on the ground floor. Register at the table and put on your nametag. Legislators will also have nametags. Find your local legislators according to nametags. Also, feel free to ask IFAPA staff for assistance in finding your legislators.

**Introduce yourself, and connect yourself to the policymaker, if possible.** Examples: Hello, my name is John Smith, and I live in your district in Council Bluffs. Hi, my name is Jane Jones, and our children are in Sunday School together.

**Thank the policymaker for his or her work.** Examples: Thank you for your work on behalf of families in Iowa. Thank you for voting against the recent budget cuts.

**Position yourself as a resource on foster care and/or adoption.** Examples: I'm an adoptive mom of two children. I have been a foster parent in Waterloo for 10 years.

**Tell the legislator one or two facts about why you are here.**

You can use examples from the IFAPA legislative agenda. Give examples to illustrate the facts and help them **see and feel** the issue. Example: My son, who was born to a mother who abused drugs during her pregnancy, started having explosive rages a few months ago. He got kicked out of daycare, and I quit work to care for him at home. Our doctor recommended we see a child psychiatrist, but we've been on the waitlist for three months. There aren't enough providers in our area, and for kids and families in crisis, three months is much too long to wait. I'd like to see the legislature increase Medicaid reimbursement rates to providers, so perhaps more people would see kids on Title XIX. Families really need the help.

**Ask permission to contact the legislator, and ask if they prefer to be contacted by phone or e-mail. Offer to be a resource on foster care/adoption/kinship (whatever your expertise) issues.** Provide your contact information. Example: Here's my business card. I'm always willing to talk more about this issue, if you'd like. I'll also follow-up with a letter. Should I e-mail you or write you?

**Thank the legislator for his or her time.** Example: Thank you for talking with me today.

# How to Effectively Contact & Communicate with Your Legislators

The most effective means of communicating with your legislators is through direct contact, either at their home, at a public meeting, in the state house or by email or on the phone. Legislators are generally very willing to meet or speak with constituents.

1. Consider yourself an information source. Legislators have limited time, staff, and interest on any one issue. They can't be as informed as they might like to be on all the issues, including the issues that concern you. You have expertise, so share it.
2. Let your legislators know how funding, services, and supports affect the children in your care. You do not need to divulge details due to confidentiality, but explain what assistance – financial and services- means to your family.
3. Tell the truth. There is no faster way to lose credibility than to give false or misleading information to a legislator.
4. Know who else is on your side. It is helpful for a legislator to know what other groups, individuals, state agencies and/or legislators support your cause. Invite legislators to your support group.
5. Make the legislator aware of any personal connection you may have. No matter how insignificant you may feel it is, if you have friends, relatives or colleagues in common, let them know.
6. Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something. If a legislator wants information you don't have or asks something you don't know, offer to get the information for them. IFAPA can provide those details.
7. Be specific. If you want a vote, information, answers to a question -whatever it is, make sure you ask for it directly and request an answer.
8. Follow up. It is important to find out if your legislator did what was promised. It is also important that you thank them if they supported your cause or voted for legislation in support of your cause.
9. Don't "burn any bridges." It is easy to get emotional over issues. That's fine, but be sure that no matter what happens you don't permanently alienate a legislator. Your strongest opponent on one issue may be an ally on another.

Remember – you have a right to be heard. Your tax money pays legislators' salaries, pays for the paper they write on, and the phone they use to call you. They are responsible to you, and will be grateful for your input.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

The IFAPA website has two web pages dedicated to keeping you informed of the latest legislative news and resources.

[www.ifapa.org/resources/legislative\\_resources.asp](http://www.ifapa.org/resources/legislative_resources.asp)

[www.ifapa.org/news/legislative\\_news.asp](http://www.ifapa.org/news/legislative_news.asp)

### Legislative Forums & Town Hall Meetings

If you can't make it to the IFAPA Legislative Breakfast, but want a chance to speak with one of your legislators, consider attending a local legislative forum or town hall meeting in your area.

[www.ifapa.org/pdf\\_docs/2010LegTownHallMeetings.pdf](http://www.ifapa.org/pdf_docs/2010LegTownHallMeetings.pdf)

### Tips for Attending a Legislative Forums

[www.ifapa.org/pdf\\_docs/TipsAttendingLegForum.pdf](http://www.ifapa.org/pdf_docs/TipsAttendingLegForum.pdf)

### Find Your Legislators

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## How to Write an Effective Letter to Your Legislator

- Keep your letters simple and to-the-point.
- Know your legislator. Find out his or her positions on the issues you're focusing on.
- Let them know you are a constituent.
- Choose one or two topics to address, and be specific whenever possible. (Such as voting for a specific bill.)
- Use a key point or short personal story that supports your position.
- Provide local context. If it affects your local community (and thus the legislator's constituents), say so!
- Ask for a commitment.
- Communicate more than once. Follow-up with an e-mail, a call, another letter. Quantity is as important than quality.

***Please visit the Legislative Resources section of the IFAPA website to view a sample letter you can write to your legislator.***