

5 Years of Key Child Welfare Legislation in Iowa

2022

Iowa Code Chapter 232 Revisions (House File 2507)

The Iowa Department of Human Services (now the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services) proposed changes to Iowa Code Chapter 232, the juvenile justice section of the Iowa Code. This led to a large-scale revision, prompted by the need to bring Iowa law into compliance with the federal Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First).

Omnibus Bill (House File 2252)

Division I – 237A.13

Code language found in 237A.13 (1d), was revised to expand Child Care Assistance (CCA) for families with a parent who is permanently disabled. This allows the family to access necessary child care services to allow the other parent in the home to be employed or pursue an education or training program.

Division II – 234.1, 234.35, 237.15

Sections 2 and 3 increased the upper age of foster care from 18 to 21 and addressed payment of foster care services. Previously, Iowa Code 234 meant a child exited foster care at 18 years old, unless the child was in the process of completing a high school diploma or equivalent. This bill amended the definition of “child” in Iowa Code 234 to allow youth who are court-ordered to foster care or a state institution under chapter 232, to remain in foster care beyond age 18, up to age 21, even if they are finished with their high school education. This also allowed youth to exit foster care and return if they are under age 21 and it is approved by the department.

Division III – 600.5, 600.6, 600.8, 600.11, 600.16A

This required inclusion of sibling information in the adoption petition, following a termination of parental rights under Chapter 232, and a plan for ongoing siblings contact if it is in the child’s best interest.

2023

Safety Planning with Guardians (House File 471)

Iowa Code section 232.79B was amended to allow the Department to engage in safety planning with a child's legal guardian in the same manner the Department would engage a parent.

Expansion of Bridge Orders (House File 359)

Under the prior statute, bridge orders could only be entered where was not a custody order in place prior to the opening of the Child in Need of Assistance (CINA) case. This legislation expanded the application to allow bridge orders to be entered when modification of an existing district court custody order is necessary to safely close the CINA case.

Foster Parents Bill of Rights (House File 584)

The legislature granted a series of rights and privileges to foster parents.

Newborn Safe Haven Act (House File 425, 474)

This expanded the ways in which an infant child can be relinquished under Iowa Code Chapter 233, Iowa's Newborn Safe Haven Act.

State Public Defender Pilot Project for Child Welfare Legal Representation (House File 113)

This amended Iowa Code section 13B.13 related to them 2020 pilot program run by the Office of the State Public Defender which provided pre-file legal representation for families at risk of having their children adjudicated in need of assistance. It expanded the program from six to sixteen counties and allowed the project that was previously scheduled to end in the summer of 2024, to continue until the summer of 2025.

2024

Mandatory Reporter Training (House File 2404)

This standardized mandatory reporter training and now requires all mandatory reporters of child and dependent adult abuse to complete the core training curriculum provided by HHS every three years.

Sexual Exploitation of a Minor (Senate File 2243)

This amended sexual exploitation of a minor to define "visual depiction of a minor" as any visual depiction that has been created, adapted, or modified to give the appearance that an identifiable minor is engaged in a prohibited sexual act or the simulation of a prohibited sexual act. "Identifiable minor" is defined as a person who was a minor at the time of the visual depiction was created, adapted, or modified, or whose image as a minor was used in creating, adapting, or modifying the visual depiction and is recognizable as an actual person by the person's face, likeness, or other distinguishing features.

2025

Expanded Foster Care Protections (Senate File 641)

This expanded child foster care protections by creating the "approved kinship caregiver" category, granting kinship caregivers rights and responsibilities similar to licensed foster care providers. When the expedited licensing process is complete, approved kinship caregivers receive the same legal standing, benefits, and obligations as licensed foster care providers, including eligibility for foster care payments, training, and support services.

2025

Custodial Rights & Duties (House File 644)

This clarified and expanded the Department's ability to delegate certain custodial rights and duties, such as consenting to routine medical care and participation in an IEP, to licensed foster parents or kinship caregivers. The bill was structured with the goal of enabling caregivers to better support children's day-to-day needs without court delays.

Family Interactions (House File 367)

Required family interactions (visitation) to continue during a CINA proceeding even when a parent is noncompliant with court or department orders, unless the court finds that contact would pose a serious risk of harm to the child. The change ensures that the court reviews a suspension of interactions prior to the suspension being put in place and makes a finding that reasonable efforts continue to be made.

2026

Foster Parent Requirements & Training (Senate File 2096)

Updated foster parent training requirements and removed the specific hour requirement by allowing HHS to consider a proposed foster parent's relevant training, experience, and circumstances when determining whether all or part of initial training may be waived. This maintained annual foster parent training for license renewal and required training to include core topics such as child welfare, supporting the child's family of origin, behavior management, trauma, and attachment, grief, and loss.

Foster Parent Address Confidentiality (House File 2526)

Specified that the Department shall not disclose to biological parents, in writing or verbally, the residential address of foster parents who are currently caring for a child in foster care. However, if the Department obtains written consent to disclose the address to a child's biological parent, then the address may appear on documents or be disclosed verbally.

9-Month Foster Placement at Disposition (House File 2526)

Modified child placement requirements in CINA dispositional proceedings. Required that if a child has been placed with a licensed foster parent for at least nine months immediately before the dispositional hearing, the court must make a specific best-interest finding and state its reasons before ordering placement with an adult relative, fictive kin, or suitable other placement identified by relatives.

To learn more about child protective services in Iowa, visit the Iowa HHS Child Protective Services webpage.

hhs.iowa.gov/programs/CPS

To learn more about foster care and adoption in Iowa, visit the Iowa HHS Child Foster Care & Adoption webpage.

hhs.iowa.gov/family-community/foster-care-adoption