



## 2026 Legislative Priorities - Building Strong Systems for Iowa's Children & Families

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### System Alignment: Child Welfare Emergency Shelters

**Why It Matters:** Every child deserves safety, stability, and the chance to remain connected to their community. Child Welfare Emergency Shelters provide short-term, minimally restrictive care for youth involved with Child Welfare, Juvenile Court, or local law enforcement, while maintaining as much normalcy as possible.

**Current Reality:** Iowa uses an outdated, split-billing system for shelter services. To receive the full daily rate for a youth, shelters must bill both the state and the child's county of residence.

Counties reimburse approximately **\$1.6 Million annually**, but this structure creates unnecessary administrative burden:

- Shelters must bill up to 99 counties, manage different processes, and track delays.
- County staff across the state process small reimbursement claims.
- Because payments are split, policymakers lack a single, clear statewide picture of shelter costs.

This funding approach reflects how shelter services were financed decades ago and no longer matches how the system operates today.

### Our Recommendation

**Eliminate the county billing requirement and make the state the single payer to providers for shelter services.** This change would:

- Streamline funding and improve transparency for the Legislature and HHS.
- Reduce administrative burden for shelters and counties.
- Allow providers to focus more time on children and families, not paperwork.
- Improve consistency statewide, regardless of where a child lives.

**Investment Needed: \$1,804,889**

This reflects funding already paid by counties today and represents a shift in payment responsibility – **not a rate increase or service expansion**. The proposal simply removes an unnecessary billing step.



## Backfill Child Protective Services (CPS) Appropriation

**Why It Matters:** One-time funding helps temporarily, but children and families need stable, ongoing support.

**Our Recommendation:** Increase the CPS appropriation by **\$4.8 million** to fully fund existing QRTP and Shelter rate increases and honor the Legislature's prior commitment to make these investments permanent.

**Investment Needed: \$4.8 million**

## Establish a Child Welfare Rate Analysis Process

**Why It Matters:** Regular review ensures Iowa has accurate information about service costs and system needs.

**Our Recommendation:** Require HHS to conduct a **biennial QRTP and Shelter rate analysis** and submit findings and recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly by **December 15, 2026**, and every two years thereafter.

## Preserve What We Have – Keep Building the System

**Why It Matters:** Progress has been made, but the system is not yet where it needs to be. Stability matters for children, families, and providers.

### Our Commitment

- Keep the system stable and functional.
- Prevent cuts to child welfare, behavioral health, and Medicaid services.
- Protect eligibility so families don't lose access to care.
- Safeguard essential Medicaid services like BHIS and community supports.
- Maintain progress from recent rate increases.

**Bottom Line:** By modernizing payment systems, reducing administrative burden, ensuring stable funding, and creating a fair review process, Iowa can strengthen services for children and families.

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