

**Disability Rights Iowa**  
**HF 2003 - Memorandum of Impact**  
**January 29, 2026**

Chairpersons and honorable members of the Committee. My name is Catherine E. Johnson. I am the Executive Director of Disability Rights Iowa. DRI is an independent, non-profit agency, which serves as the designated protection and advocacy system for people with disabilities in the state of Iowa, pursuant to federal mandates. The mission of the agency is to protect and advocate for the human and legal rights of Iowans with disabilities. I appear before you to share DRI's concerns regarding the impact of HF 2002 on the Disability Community.

**Overview of HF 2003:**

HF 2003 requires the Iowa Department of Education to establish a pilot program for one rural school and one urban school to establish attendance centers for the purpose of educating eligible students.

The bill defines eligible students to include only students with disabilities:

“as those who require special education or “whose emotional, social, or behavioral needs interfere with the student’s ability to be successful in the regular educational environment, even with the use of supplementary aids and services.”

HF 2003 is unclear as to whether there will also be general education students present in the same building, and whether “eligible students” will have access to general education students, curriculum, and non-academic opportunities.

**Potential Impacts on Students with disabilities:**

Until 1975 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), students with disabilities were regularly turned away from public schools. No federal law existed that required students with disabilities to receive a free appropriate public education alongside their nondisabled peers to the greatest extent reasonable to meet their needs. Congress recognized this long history of excluding students with disabilities from the general education classroom in enacting the IDEA. Congress

sought to remedy segregation of students with disabilities and “provide an equal educational opportunity” to all students, and specifically students with disabilities.

The IDEA, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Iowa Special Education laws all require that students with disabilities are educated alongside their nondisabled peers to the greatest extent reasonable to meet their needs.

The IDEA requires that students be educated “as close as possible” to their home *unless* that school building cannot implement the student’s IEP. Placement in separate classes or schools should only be done due to the nature or severity of the student’s disability. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act includes similar requirements.

Placement in an attendance center designed to solely educate students with disabilities in a separate class or school is a highly restrictive placement. These students generally do not have access to the general education classroom, nondisabled peers, or non-academic activities. Such restrictive placements are not appropriate for the majority of students with disabilities. Changing the location of the instruction provided does not in itself mean that the instruction is more effective at addressing the student’s needs.

HF 2003 effectively creates segregated classrooms and/or buildings that isolate students with disabilities away from general education and nondisabled peers. In most situations, this placement would violate the IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Once built, there will be motivation to fill the segregated classrooms and/or buildings with students. Providing educational placement options that may violate the IDEA, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Iowa Special Education laws places school district in the position of making both inappropriate educational placement decisions and decisions that violate a student’s rights under IDEA and Section 504.

### **DRI Opposes HF 2003:**

DRI strongly opposes this legislation. DRI urges legislators to thoughtfully consider the testimony submitted today, the concerns previously shared by parents and stakeholders, and to take time fully understand the impact of HF 2003 on students with disabilities. DRI requests that you vote against HF 2003. DRI welcomes the opportunity to discuss our concerns more in-depth with any member of the Iowa Legislature, Thank you in advance for your thoughtful deliberation of our testimony in opposition to HF 2003.