

505.8 Commissioner's general powers and duties — consumer advocate bureau established.

1. The commissioner of insurance shall be the head of the division, and shall have general control, supervision, and direction over all insurance business transacted in the state, and shall enforce all the laws of the state relating to federal and state insurance business transacted in the state.

2. The commissioner shall, subject to [chapter 17A](#), establish, publish, and enforce rules not inconsistent with law for the enforcement of this subtitle and for the enforcement of the laws, the administration and supervision of which are imposed on the division, including rules to establish fees sufficient to administer the laws, where appropriate fees are not otherwise provided for in rule or statute.

3. The commissioner shall supervise all transactions relating to the organization, reorganization, liquidation, and dissolution of domestic insurance corporations, and all transactions leading up to the organization of such corporations.

4. The commissioner shall also supervise the sale in the state of all stock, certificates, or other evidences of interest, either by domestic or foreign insurance companies or organizations proposing to engage in any insurance business.

5. The commissioner shall supervise all health insurance purchasing cooperatives providing services or operating within the state and the organization of domestic cooperatives. The commissioner may admit nondomestic health insurance purchasing cooperatives under the same standards as domestic cooperatives.

6. The commissioner shall provide assistance to the public and to consumers of insurance products and services in this state.

a. The commissioner shall accept inquiries and complaints from the public regarding the business of insurance. The commissioner or the commissioner's designee may respond to inquiries and complaints, and may examine or investigate such inquiries and complaints to determine whether laws in this subtitle and rules adopted pursuant to such laws have been violated.

b. The commissioner shall establish a bureau, to be known as the "consumer advocate bureau", which shall be responsible for ensuring fair treatment of consumers and for preventing unfair or deceptive trade practices in the marketplace and by persons under the jurisdiction of the commissioner.

(1) The commissioner, with the advice of the governor, shall appoint a consumer advocate who shall be knowledgeable in the area of insurance and particularly in the area of consumer protection. The consumer advocate shall be the chief administrator of the consumer advocate bureau.

(2) The consumer advocate bureau may receive and may investigate consumer complaints and inquiries from the public, and may conduct investigations to determine whether any person has violated any provision of the insurance code, including [chapters 507B](#) and [522B](#), and any provisions related to the establishment of insurance rates.

(3) The consumer advocate bureau shall perform other functions as may be assigned to it by the commissioner related to consumer advocacy.

(4) The consumer advocate bureau shall work in conjunction with other areas of the insurance division on matters of mutual interest. The insurance division shall cooperate with the consumer advocate in fulfilling the duties of the consumer advocate bureau. The consumer advocate may also seek assistance from other federal or state agencies or private entities for the purpose of assisting consumers.

(5) When necessary or appropriate to protect the public interest or consumers, the consumer advocate may request that the commissioner conduct rate filing reviews as provided in [section 505.15](#) or administrative hearings as provided in [section 505.29](#).

(6) The commissioner, in cooperation with the consumer advocate, shall prepare and deliver a report to the general assembly by January 15 of each year that contains findings and recommendations regarding the activities of the consumer advocate bureau including but not limited to all of the following:

(a) An overview of the functions of the bureau.

- (b) The structure of the bureau including the number and type of staff positions.
 - (c) Statistics showing the number of complaints handled by the bureau, the nature of the complaints including the line of business involved and their disposition, and the disposition of similar issues in other states.
 - (d) Actions commenced by the consumer advocate.
 - (e) Studies performed by the consumer advocate.
 - (f) Educational and outreach efforts of the consumer advocate bureau.
 - (g) Recommendations from the commissioner and the consumer advocate about additional consumer protection functions that would be appropriate and useful for the bureau or the insurance division to fulfill based on observations and analysis of trends in complaints and information derived from national or other sources.
 - (h) Recommendations from the commissioner and the consumer advocate about any needs for additional funding, staffing, legislation, or administrative rules.
- c. When necessary or appropriate to protect the public interest or consumers, the commissioner may conduct, or the commissioner's designee may request that the commissioner conduct, administrative hearings as provided in this subtitle.
- d. The commissioner may adopt rules for the administration of [this subsection](#).
7. The commissioner shall have regulatory authority over health benefit plans and adopt rules under [chapter 17A](#) as necessary, to promote the uniformity, cost efficiency, transparency, and fairness of such plans for physicians and osteopathic physicians licensed under [chapter 148](#) and hospitals licensed under [chapter 135B](#), for the purpose of maximizing administrative efficiencies and minimizing administrative costs of health care providers and health insurers.
8. a. Notwithstanding [chapter 22](#), the commissioner shall keep confidential the information submitted to the insurance division or obtained by the insurance division in the course of an investigation or inquiry pursuant to [subsection 6](#), including all notes, work papers, or other documents related to the investigation. Information obtained by the commissioner in the course of investigating a complaint or inquiry may, in the discretion of the commissioner, be provided to the insurance company or insurance producer that is the subject of the complaint or inquiry, to the consumer who filed the complaint or inquiry, and to the individual insured who is the subject of the complaint or inquiry, without waiving the confidentiality afforded to the commissioner or to other persons by [this subsection](#). The commissioner may disclose or release information that is otherwise confidential under [this subsection](#), in the course of an administrative or judicial proceeding.
- b. Notwithstanding [chapter 22](#), the commissioner shall keep confidential both information obtained by or submitted to the insurance division pursuant to [chapters 514J](#) and [515D](#).
- c. The commissioner shall adopt rules protecting the privacy of information held by an insurer or an agent consistent with the federal Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, Pub. L. No. 106-102.
- d. Notwithstanding paragraphs "a", "b", and "c", if the commissioner determines that it is necessary or appropriate in the public interest or for the protection of the public, the commissioner may share information with other regulatory authorities or governmental agencies or may publish information concerning a violation of [this chapter](#) or a rule or order under [this chapter](#). Such information may be redacted so that personally identifiable information is not made available.
- e. The commissioner may adopt rules protecting the privacy of information submitted to the insurance division consistent with [this section](#).
9. Notwithstanding [chapter 22](#), the commissioner may keep confidential any social security number, residence address, and residence telephone number that is contained in a record filed as part of a licensing, registration, or filing process if disclosure is not required in the performance of any duty or is not otherwise required under law.
10. The commissioner may, after a hearing conducted pursuant to [chapter 17A](#), assess fines or penalties; assess costs of an examination, investigation, or proceeding; order restitution; or take other corrective action as the commissioner deems necessary and appropriate to accomplish compliance with the laws of the state relating to all insurance business transacted in the state.
11. The commissioner may do any of the following:
- a. Conduct public or private investigations within or outside of this state which the

commissioner deems necessary or appropriate to determine whether a person has violated, is violating, or is about to violate a provision of any chapter of this subtitle or a rule adopted or order issued under any chapter of this subtitle, or to aid in the enforcement of any chapter of this subtitle or in the adoption of rules and forms under any chapter of this subtitle.

b. Require or permit a person to testify, file a statement, or produce a record under oath or otherwise as the commissioner determines, concerning facts and circumstances relating to a matter being investigated or about which an action or proceeding will be instituted.

c. Notwithstanding [subsection 8](#), publish a record concerning an action, proceeding, or investigation under, or a violation of, any chapter of this subtitle or a rule adopted or order issued under any chapter of this subtitle, if the commissioner determines that such publication is in the public interest and is necessary and appropriate for the protection of the public.

12. For the purpose of an investigation made under any chapter of this subtitle, the commissioner or the commissioner's designee may administer oaths and affirmations, subpoena witnesses, seek compulsory attendance, take evidence, require the filing of statements, and require the production of any records that the commissioner considers relevant or material to the investigation, pursuant to rules adopted under [chapter 17A](#). The confidentiality provisions of [subsection 8](#) shall apply to information and material obtained pursuant to [this subsection](#).

13. If a person does not appear or refuses to testify, or does not file a statement or produce records, or otherwise does not obey a subpoena or order issued by the commissioner under any chapter of this subtitle, the commissioner may, in addition to assessing the penalties contained in [sections 505.7A, 507B.6A, 507B.7, 522B.11, and 522B.17](#), make application to a district court of this state or another state to enforce compliance with the subpoena or order. A court to whom application is made to enforce compliance with a subpoena or order pursuant to this subtitle may do any of the following:

- a. Hold the person in contempt.
- b. Order the person to appear before the commissioner.
- c. Order the person to testify about the matter under investigation.
- d. Order the production of records.
- e. Grant injunctive relief, including restricting or prohibiting the offer or sale of insurance or insurance advice.
- f. Impose a civil penalty as set forth in [section 505.7A](#).
- g. Grant any other necessary or appropriate relief.

14. [This section](#) shall not be construed to prohibit a person from applying to a district court of this state or another state for relief from a subpoena or order issued by the commissioner under any chapter of this subtitle.

15. An individual shall not be relieved of an order to appear, testify, file a statement, produce a record or other evidence, or obey a subpoena or other order of the commissioner made under any chapter of this subtitle on the grounds that fulfillment of the requirement may, directly or indirectly, tend to incriminate the individual or subject the individual to a criminal fine, penalty, or forfeiture. If an individual refuses to obey a subpoena or order by asserting that individual's privilege against self-incrimination, the commissioner may apply to the district court to compel the individual to obey the subpoena or order of the commissioner. Testimony, records, or other evidence that is compelled by a court enforcing an order of the commissioner shall not be used, directly or indirectly, against that individual in a criminal case, except in a prosecution for perjury or contempt or for otherwise failing to comply with the order.

16. Upon request of the insurance regulator of another state or foreign jurisdiction, the commissioner may provide assistance in conducting an investigation to determine whether a person has violated, is violating, or is about to violate an insurance law or rule of the other state or foreign jurisdiction administered or enforced by that insurance regulator. The commissioner may provide such assistance pursuant to the powers conferred under [this section](#) as the commissioner determines is necessary or appropriate under the circumstances. Such assistance may be provided regardless of whether the conduct being investigated would constitute a violation of this subtitle or any other law of this state if the conduct occurred in this state. In determining whether to provide such assistance the

commissioner may consider whether the insurance regulator requesting the assistance is permitted to and has agreed to reciprocate in providing assistance to the commissioner upon request, whether compliance with the request would violate or prejudice the public policy of this state, and the availability of division commissioner resources and employees to provide such assistance.

17. The commissioner shall utilize the senior health insurance information program to assist in the dissemination of objective and noncommercial educational material and to raise awareness of prudent consumer choices in considering the purchase of various insurance products designed for the health care needs of older Iowans.

18. The commissioner shall annually convene a work group composed of the consumer advocate, health insurance carriers, health care providers, small employers that purchase health insurance under [chapter 513B](#), and individual consumers in the state for the purpose of considering ways to reduce the cost of providing health insurance coverage and health care services, including but not limited to utilization of uniform billing codes, improvements to provider credentialing procedures, reducing out-of-state care expenses, annually assessing the impact of federal health care reform legislation on health care costs in the state and determining whether such legislation has reduced the cost of health insurance in the state, and the electronic delivery of explanation of benefits statements. The recommendations made by the work group shall be included in the annual report filed with the general assembly pursuant to [section 505.18](#).

19. The commissioner may propose and promulgate administrative rules to effectuate the insurance provisions of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, Pub. L. No. 111-148, as amended by the federal Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-152, and any amendments thereto, or other applicable federal law.

[S13, §1683-r3; C24, 27, 31, 35, 39, §8613; C46, 50, 54, §505.8; C58, 62, §505.8, 522.3; C66, 71, 73, §505.8, 515.150, 522.3; C75, 77, 79, 81, §505.8]

83 Acts, ch 27, §10; 88 Acts, ch 1159, §2; 90 Acts, ch 1234, §2; 94 Acts, ch 1176, §3; 97 Acts, ch 23, §61; 98 Acts, ch 1119, §3; 99 Acts, ch 114, §41; 2000 Acts, ch 1023, §4, 5; 2002 Acts, ch 1111, §6; 2003 Acts, ch 91, §2; 2007 Acts, ch 137, §6; 2007 Acts, ch 215, §117; 2008 Acts, ch 1123, §7 – 9; 2008 Acts, ch 1175, §1; 2008 Acts, ch 1188, §21; 2009 Acts, ch 133, §168; 2009 Acts, ch 145, §3; 2010 Acts, ch 1121, §5, 33; 2011 Acts, ch 70, §2, 3; 2013 Acts, ch 124, §7

Referred to in §505.7, 505.18, 508.36, 508E.10, 514G.110, 515D.10

See also §523A.801 and 523I.201