



Consumer Advocacy Officer, Iowa Insurance
Division Annual Report

Submitted to the 91st Iowa General Assembly
January 15, 2025

I. Background

The Consumer Advocacy Officer (Consumer Advocate) was established in 2008 under Iowa Code §505.8(6)(b) and requires an annual report on the activities and statistics of the Consumer Advocate.

Sonya Sellmeyer is the Consumer Advocate for the Iowa Insurance Division (Division). The goal of the position is to provide fair assistance to consumers in all lines of insurance and investment business under the authority of the Division.

II. 2024 Activities

The functions of the Consumer Advocate include: (a) aiding consumers with inquiries, complaints, and requests for additional review, (b) health insurance rate reviews, (c) conducting insurance industry studies, (d) education and outreach to lowans, and (e) recommending cases for administrative action. To further these functions, the work of the Consumer Advocate in 2024 focused on the following activities.

A. Consumer Complaints, Inquiries, Appeals, and 515D hearing requests

The Consumer Advocate responds to consumer questions or problems via complaints, inquiries, phone calls, and emails. The Division's Market Regulation and Securities Bureaus are the front line for investigating consumer complaints. If a consumer requests an additional review of a complaint decision, the Consumer Advocate handles the appeal and renders an independent opinion. In 2024, 60 consumers appealed to the Consumer Advocate for additional reviews covering an auto warranty, investments, health, life, property and casualty, and long-term care insurance. The Consumer Advocate recovered \$312,668.12 for Iowa consumers.

Under Iowa Code §515D.10 an insured on an auto policy who has received a statement of cancellation, or an insurer's intent not to renew a policy, may, within 15 days of receipt or delivery of a statement of reason, request a hearing before the Insurance Commissioner. To reduce the number of requests set for hearing, the Consumer Advocate assisted all involved parties to mediate the cancellation or non-renewal issue. The Consumer Advocate had 10 §515D requests for a hearing in 2024. Five of the requests were resolved with a reinstatement of auto insurance coverage, and all were resolved without a hearing.

In 2024, the Consumer Advocate referred one complaint to review as a new administrative action, assisted the Market Regulation Bureau with market conduct issue, and made two referrals to the Division's Fraud Bureau.

Please see Appendix A for a summary of the consumer complaints handled by the Insurance Division’s Market Regulation Bureau by the line of insurance.

B. The Individual Health Insurance Market Rate Review Process Iowa Code §505.19

The Consumer Advocate assisted consumers with their notice and hearing rights associated with individual marketplace and “grandfathered” or “transitional” individual health insurance policy rate increases for the plan year 2025. Iowa law provides for a policyholder's right of notice and public hearing when a rate increase request by a company is above the average annual health spending growth rate of 5.6% (as established by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services). The health insurers requesting rate increases that met this criterion for the hearing included the following:

Company Name	Average Percentage of Increase Requested	Approximate Affected Policyholders
Golden Rule – Pre-ACA Individual	12.3% ¹	1,055
Wellmark Health Plan of Iowa – Pre-ACA Individual	8.3% ²	500
Wellmark Inc. – Pre-ACA Individual	7.0% ³	24,500

The Consumer Advocate’s role in the qualifying rate hearing process is to solicit consumer comments regarding the proposed rate increase and to share the received comments with the public and Commissioner of Insurance during the public hearing.⁴ Twenty-two consumer comments were submitted during the proposed 2025 rate hearing process, up from one last year. The Division held the public hearing on August 8, 2024, at 5 p.m. at the Division. Consumers viewed the hearing online via Zoom, allowing affected members of the public from across Iowa to participate without driving. Three insureds participated in the hearing in person or via Zoom. All reports on the public comments and testimony

¹The original rate increase was 16.6%, but after considerable communication between the carrier, Division, and its consultants – the proposal was revised to 12.3%.

² The proposed rate change varied by plan and ranged from 5.5% to 8.6%.

³ The proposed rate increase for all benefit plans varied from 5.5% to 8.6%.

⁴ Public comments are also solicited on small group coverages, but not subject to the hearing.

received on the proposed rate increases were provided to Commissioner Ommen and remain available for public review at [the Division website](#).

C. Studies

Annually, and as required by Iowa Code §505.18, the Consumer Advocate conducts a health care data call to collect information regarding the cost and quality of health care insurance readily available to consumers. The report provides aggregate health insurance data concerning loss ratios of health insurance carriers licensed to do business in the state, rate increase data and history, health care expenditures and how they affect health insurance premium rates, factors that result in higher and lower costs, medical trends affecting health insurance rates in the state, and any additional data appropriate to provide the governor and general assembly with pertinent health insurance cost information.

The annual healthcare cost [report](#) was submitted on November 15, 2024, to Governor Reynolds and the Iowa Legislature and may be found on the [Division website](#).

D. Outreach and Education

Connecting with Iowans is essential to educate all consumers about insurance, financial literacy, and fraud prevention. In 2024, the Division continued consumer educational outreach, with the addition of a new Financial Literacy Director Heather Kriener in January 2024. The following is a summary of their work. The Consumer Advocate participated and assisted with the organization and promotion of these programs.

Iowa Students

As a new effort in 2024, the Division expanded its partnerships to include elementary-level programming. In the summer of 2024, the Division sponsored 200 students to go through Junior Achievement (JA) of Central Iowa's summer BizTown program. Beginning in the fall, the Division also supported their K-5 in-classroom curriculum. So far, 574 elementary students have completed this curriculum. JA's lessons in financial literacy, work and career readiness, and entrepreneurship positively impact the lives of young people. These lessons align with national and state educational standards and are delivered to students with the help of teachers and volunteers from the local community.

Financial literacy helps middle and high school students take a positive step toward a financially successful future. The Division sponsors *Spend It or Save It*

from the National Theater for Children (NTC). This program uses professional actors to teach students about wants versus needs, the difference between debit and credit cards, and the importance of compounding interest by engaging middle and junior high students through theatrical comedy sketches. During the 2023-2024 school year, NTC reached 9,737 Iowa students and 602 teachers by visiting 100 schools and performing 109 shows. NTC also provided each school with workbooks, infographic posters, online teacher toolkits, and digital games and activities so educational content could continue after the assembly. Their programs received great reviews from students and teachers.

A teacher from Colo-Nesco Jr. High School commented, *“I thought this was a great program for students to learn the importance of money. We have students in middle and high school that seem to not understand how money works. Even as an adult I sometimes struggle, students have already raved about how fun this was and how they understand the difference in money types now.”*

In 2024, the Division sponsored "Funding the Future" live performances at nine middle/high schools, reaching 2,590 students. At these events, musician Carter Hulseby performed and then spoke to students about general financial literacy, the dangers of credit card debt, the pitfalls of predatory lending and payday loans, creating a savings and investment game plan, and debunking the hype around money.

The Division continues to financially sponsor EVERFI's Financial Literacy, Venture, Keys to Your Future (college and career readiness), and Marketplace platforms. All four programs are student-driven, engaging, online resources that use real-life simulations, videos, animations, and interactive activities to bring complex financial concepts to life. During the 2023-2024 school year, the Division's support of EVERFI's educational resources reached 15,374 Iowa high



school students for 43,489 hours of learning at 228 schools. In October, several members of the Iowa Department of Insurance and Financial Services staff, including the Insurance Commissioner, Superintendent of Banking, and the Superintendent of the Credit Union Division visited four Iowa schools. At the

events they discussed financial literacy and career readiness with approximately 500 students.

The [Division continues its partnership with the University of Northern Iowa](#) (UNI) to support the Wilson College of Business Financial Skills for Smart Living program. Last year, the Division began reimbursement to high school students who passed the exam. This proved highly effective in increasing the number of students opting to take the exam by 79%. Students who pass the exam earn three college credit hours and are reimbursed the initial exam fee of \$100 in the form of a Visa prepaid card. The Division's donation this year also supported the training of the teachers, classroom materials, and teacher incentives. In the 2023–2024 school year, 708 out of 898 students passed the exam.

Adults



In 2024, the Division partnered with the Iowa Attorney General's office and AARP for our *Stop the Scammers* Tour as part of the [Iowa Fraud Fighters program](#). At the events, attendees learned how to shield their investments and savings from scammers. The tour visited 18 cities in Iowa and educated a total of 1,001 Iowans. The Financial Literacy

Director also did 14 in-person and virtual Fraud Fighter events educating approximately 890 additional Iowans. The Fraud Fighters website added 6,874 new users and 15,396 views in 2024. New to the Fraud Fighter's website and programming are three videos featuring Iowans who were victims of the grandparent, Amazon, and gift card scams.

To assist in the fight against fraud across Iowa, the Financial Literacy Director continued to train directors and volunteers from the AmeriCorps Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) to present the [Iowa Fraud Fighter's presentation to local organizations on our behalf](#). This allows the Fraud Fighter platform to reach a wider audience to protect Iowa consumers against fraud. In 2024, the Division continued its contracts with nine RSVP chapters, for 18 presentations reaching 382 Iowans. The RSVP program participation represents volunteer community members looking out for fellow Iowans by educating and bringing about fraud awareness. The Division is developing a similar partnership with the Dubuque Esports chapter in 2025.

The Division continues with the [Lucha Antifraude de Iowa](#) (Lucha Antifraude) website, the Spanish version of the Iowa Fraud Fighters program. The campaign's objective is to educate our target audience on investment and consumer fraud, empower them to recognize scams, report them to appropriate authorities, and thus help them protect their savings. The website saw 3,042 new users and 4,253 views in 2024.

The Division's retirement security initiative [Save4Later Iowa](#) is free to all Iowans at any age or stage of their financial journey to retirement. The Save4Later website contains educational videos, action guides, calculators, and educational courses on subjects as simple as budgeting and how to make your money last through retirement. The purpose of the website is to offer Iowans a sales-free source of information to help plan, earn, save, and ultimately retire in a financially sound manner. The free, online courses were accessed by 2,153 users in 2024. The Division's Financial Literacy Director also provided education to 1,089 Iowans in the past year under this initiative.

[Care4Kids](#), a Save4Later initiative, was developed in 2023 to educate Iowa child care providers about state resources available while providing an atmosphere to discuss the challenges of running a child care business. In 2024, the Division partnered with the Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children (AEYC) for both their Spring and Fall Institutes. At the Spring Institute, the Division sponsored a breakfast for attendees and partnered with the Iowa Center for Economic Success to present essential financial literacy information for running a child care business. Care4Kids also had a booth at this event to provide educational materials to around 300 attendees. At their Fall Institute the Division had a booth, and the Financial Literacy Director presented a 90-minute breakout session on health insurance, saving for retirement, and investing. A second 90-minute breakout session was presented under the Care4Kids program by the Business Coach for the Iowa Center of Economic Success on small business essentials. Approximately 300 providers were reached at this event. The Care4Kids website saw 1,187 users in 2024.

The Division also continued its women-focused [SmartHER Money](#) financial literacy program with 12,505 page views on the website and 589,921 people reached via social media. The Consumer Advocate did a two-part presentation to 17 attendees on investing and retirement readiness to the United Way of Story County Women United leadership program and participated in a Business Record Fearless panel discussion to educate women on financial wellness. The Division was a sponsor for the Women Lead Change conferences in Des Moines and the Quad Cities where SmartHER Money had a booth where we educated

attendees about the program as well as a chance to provide a brief overall of the program to all participants from the stage. Approximately 1,800 women were reached at these 2 events. In addition, the Financial Literacy Director took part in nine radio or newspaper interviews sharing the program information with Iowa women.

The Financial Literacy Director is also the Division's representative and leader for the Iowa Inter-agency Financial Literacy Group, a cohort within Iowa state government that promotes, identifies, and coordinates the financial literacy efforts of state agencies. The group generates efficiencies, fosters communication, collaboration, and shares best practices that positively impact all Iowans.

Due to the state agency collaboration within the interagency financial literacy group, the Consumer Advocate did the first two monthly virtual workshops for Iowa Workforce Development and their Iowa Works program, and the Financial Literacy Director completed the remainder. An hour-long virtual presentation on a wide range of financial literacy topics such as savings accounts, debt management, investments, and insurance was presented each month.

In 2024, the Consumer Advocate served as the Vice President [of Iowa JumpStart Coalition](#), a nonprofit organization comprised of individuals representing businesses, government, and education who have joined together to improve the personal financial literacy of all Iowans. The Financial Literacy Director will continue the Division's involvement and serve as the Secretary in 2025.

Through connections made at the Iowa JumpStart Coalition, the Division formed a new partnership with [DMACC Workforce Training Academy](#). The purpose of the academy is to empower students to move toward higher-paying careers with the goal of financial stability. The Financial Literacy Director presented to 8 classes in 2024 to talk about things like budgeting, credit scores, and fraud. This partnership continues into 2025.

The Consumer Advocate continued the ["Consumer Connection"](#) electronic newsletter started in December 2019. The "Consumer Connection" educates consumers on protection against fraud, current and basic insurance information, and retirement planning and security. Sioux City AM Radio KSCJ regularly has the Consumer Advocate on to discuss the most recent Consumer Connection on the evening "Drivetime Live" show. The educational piece has also received print space in multiple smaller newspapers around the state. The Consumer Advocate has also conducted at least 18 other radio, television, and print interviews with different media outlets from Iowa on various insurance topics.

The Consumer Advocate and Financial Literacy Director presented in Cedar Rapids and Des Moines at [Insure Your Future](#) events for college students interested in the insurance industry. Long-term care insurance was the subject of a [presentation](#) in the Quad City area.

The Division, Financial Literacy Director, and Consumer Advocate will continue involvement in the financial literacy for all Iowans to encourage a stable financial future.

E. Additional Consumer Protection Functions

Based on the current complaint and inquiry trends, it is evident that the ever-changing world of insurance and investments requires additional education and outreach to all Iowans to ensure a strong economy. Those education initiatives are a priority for the Consumer Advocate. In 2024, the Consumer Advocate increased education on insurance issues, disaster preparedness, recovery, and consumer protection.

A team of employees from the Division responded to Greenfield in May after the tornado. The Consumer Advocate participated in the Multi-Agency Resource Center (MARC) locations in Greenfield and Spencer, two town halls in Greenfield, and four [Agricultural Resource Centers](#) (AgRC) in Taynor, Oakland, Correctionville, and Tipton. The AgRCs were geared toward agricultural producers who had been affected by the natural disasters and served 153 individuals from 126 households. The Consumer Advocate also trained Iowa's Disaster Case Advocates on how insurance works when a disaster occurs.

One of the Consumer Advocate's main objectives for 2025 continues to be the protection and education of all Iowa consumers especially in preparedness and responsiveness to disasters.

Recommendations

A. Legislation and Administrative Rules

The Division is introducing six bills this legislative session dealing with the regulation of insurance and service contracts. The Division is also initiating legislation regarding financial literacy and financial exploitation efforts. The Consumer Advocate is in support of any laws that strengthen Iowa's already strong insurance market, and the protection and education of Iowa's consumers. The Consumer Advocate will continue working with all areas of the Division

throughout 2025 to suggest and file legislation and administrative rules as needed.

III. Conclusion

The work of the Consumer Advocate exists to represent and aid Iowa's policyholders and investors. The Consumer Advocate and all Division employees who work to serve consumers, thank the Legislature for this opportunity. Upon request, additional information will be provided on any of the consumer activities of the Consumer Advocate and Division.

Sincerely,

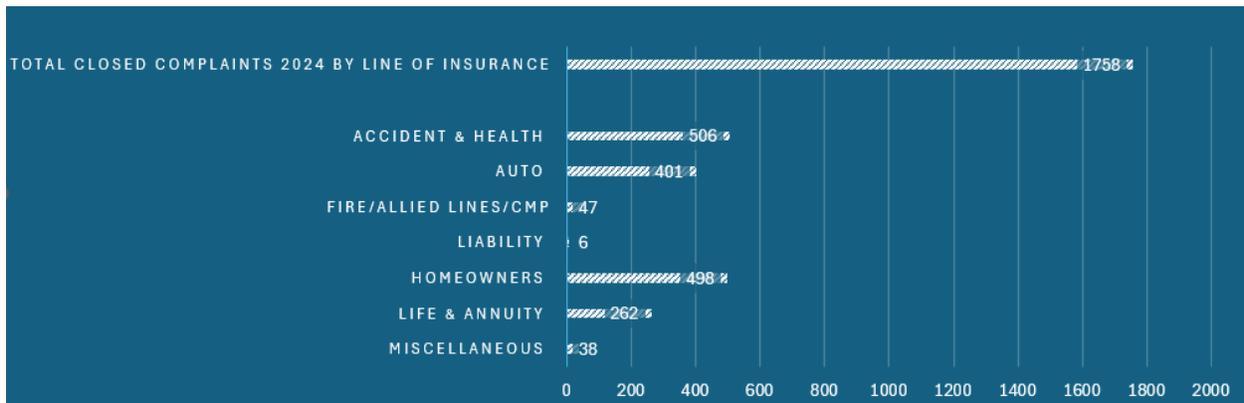
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sonya M. Sellmeyer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

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Appendix A: 2024 Complaint Statistics for Iowa

The following statistics reflect the 2024 closed cases of the Market Regulation Bureau of the Iowa Insurance Division per Iowa Code §505.8(6)(b)(6)(c).

Complaints Handled in 2024 by the Iowa Insurance Division Market Regulation Bureau by Line of Insurance



2024 Closed Insurance Complaints for Iowa and Surrounding States

Closed Iowa Complaints	Closed Minnesota Complaints	Closed Missouri Complaints	Closed Nebraska Complaints	Closed South Dakota Complaints	Closed Wisconsin Complaints
1,758	3,927	2,905	1,214	507	2,770