ASSOCIATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD IOWA
AREA BOARDS AND ADVOCATES
ADVOCATING FOR IOWA'S FUTURE

Modernize ECI before broader contract transfers

Association of Early Childhood Iowa Area Boards & Advocates | Legislative briefing

Association request: Pilot voluntary transfers, evaluate the results, and develop one shared state–local plan before new statewide mandates or deadlines.

Why timing matters

ECI Directors, State ECI Board members and Iowa HHS are working together to modernize Chapter 256I. This work is intended to clarify roles, improve efficiency, strengthen accountability and build a sustainable local early childhood system. Yet local participants report that Title IV-E funding and the future Family Support structure have not been fully incorporated into these discussions.

In some ECI areas, home visitation contract administration helps support the Director and the broader local coordination system. If contracts and associated funding move first, staffing capacity could decline before the future duties and funding of ECI are determined.

The work that remains, regardless of who holds contracts

Local ECI function	Potential effect of reduced capacity
Needs assessments and strategic planning	Less ability to identify service gaps, understand family needs and plan local investments.
Citizen-led Board governance	Less staff support for informed decisions, oversight and accountability.
Local investments and contract oversight	Less time for monitoring remaining programs, fiscal stewardship and provider support.
Community collaboration and referrals	Fewer opportunities to connect family support, child care, early learning and health services.
Continuous quality improvement and outcomes	Reduced capacity to track results, solve problems and improve services.

What this could mean for constituents

Families could face more fragmented referrals; providers could have less local support; and rural communities could experience slower responses to service gaps. Conversely, if local coordination is protected and eligible federal funding expands services, families could benefit from improved access.

Changing who holds a contract does not necessarily change a family's experience. Changing the infrastructure that connects families to services can.

One coordinated plan for Iowa

Chapter 256I modernization + Title IV-E + state–local service delivery

Pilot versus mandate: use the opportunity to learn

The Association proposes using the existing local-board-requested transfer process to test the model with willing ECI areas. Evaluate costs, staffing, access, quality and continuity before broader requirements. The Association reports that a six-year contract approach tied to Title IV-E is being developed; details have not yet been shared with local areas.

Funding should follow the responsibilities

The presentation identifies the conditional three-year distribution of additional Title IV-E funds: 25% in FY 2027–28, 15% in FY 2028–29 and 5% in FY 2029–30. A declining percentage does not necessarily mean a declining need for local coordination.

Explore whether allowable funding mechanisms could support community collaboration agreements, staffing for areas that voluntarily combine functions, or reimbursement of eligible services that frees available ECI dollars for local priorities. Each option requires financial and compliance review.

Compare administrative options using the same criteria

Continued local ECI administration | ECI-led Administrative Service Organization (ASO), subject to federal and state requirements | HHS district administration. Compare total costs, access, quality, continuity, accountability, local voice and ECI viability.

Four considerations for the interim committee

Requested action	What the Association asks the committee to establish
01 Obtain HHS information	Written ECFS and Family Support plans, transfer details, cost and revenue projections, access data and area-by-area staffing impacts.
02 Jointly resolve concerns	Document how ECI Boards, Directors, providers and community partners participate in design and how concerns are addressed.
03 Evaluate options and protect ECI	Test models through voluntary pilots and compare results; demonstrate safeguards for local capacity and continuity.
04 Coordinate long-term investments	Define future ECI duties through 256I modernization, identify staffing needs and establish sustainable state and local funding before broader transfers.

Define the work. Determine the capacity. Fund the responsibilities. Then implement coordinated changes.