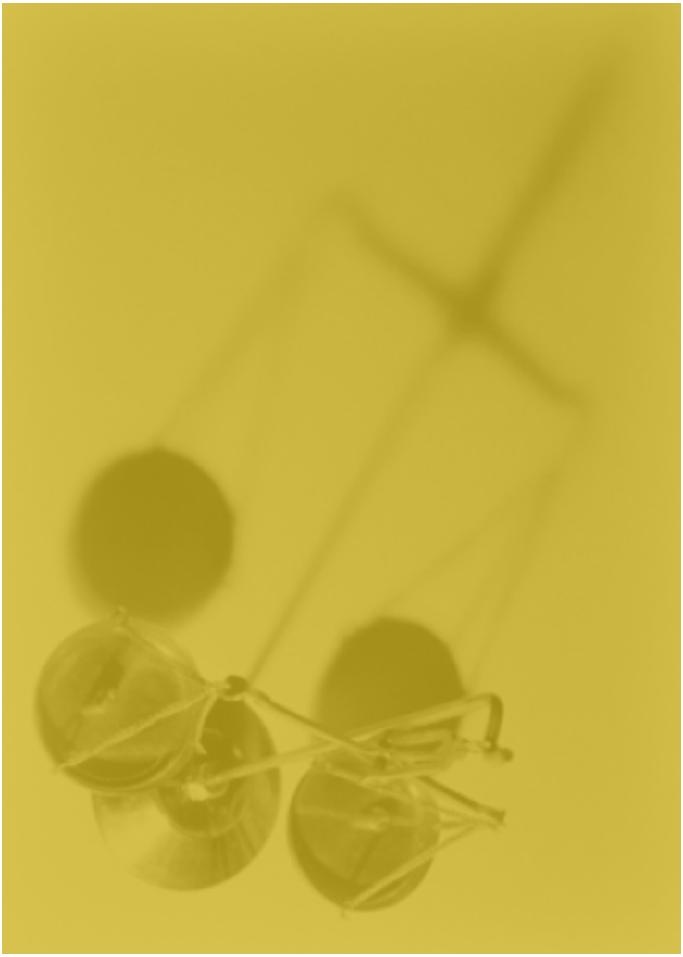
Iowa Courts Work for Iowans



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**All statistics used in this brochure are rough estimates from one of the following sources: the state court administrator's office, chief juvenile court officers, or Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning.*

Iowa Courts Work for Iowans

There is much more to the work of the courts than the occasional high-profile case that attracts public attention. The bulk of our work involves everyday problems that affect ordinary Iowans. Our courts:

- Serve as part of the state's safety net for abused and neglected children
- Help shield victims of violence from further harm
- Work to prevent and address juvenile delinquency
- Try to give broken families some measure of order in the midst of turmoil
- Serve as the primary avenue Iowans take to resolve their civil legal problems
- Play a major role in the enforcement of Iowa's criminal laws and the protection of constitutional rights

Child in **Need** of Assistance

Courts play a critical role in the lives of abused and neglected children. In child-in-need-of-assistance (CINA) cases, judges make life-altering decisions. They must decide whether to:

- Remove a child from a parent
- Place a child in foster care, decide where, and for how long
- Keep siblings together or send them to different foster homes
- Provide treatment and services to the child and the child's parents
- Reunite the child and parents or terminate parental rights
- Allow the adoption of a child

2010 Facts

Iowa Courts handled 5,182 child-in-need-of-assistance cases and 1,706 termination of parental rights cases.

At any given time, there are about 5,300 Iowa children in foster care.

Juvenile Delinquency

Courts work to prevent and address juvenile delinquency. Each year, juvenile court services (JCS) and others work with thousands of troubled children and teens to ensure community safety, hold them accountable, and change their negative behavior.

In 2010, JCS worked with **22,432 youths** in an informal process to hold youths accountable without filing formal delinquency charges. In addition, Iowa Courts handled **5,411 juvenile delinquency** cases and **1,490 juvenile commitment actions** for mental health or substance abuse problems.

Helping Youths Overcome Problems:

JCS tries to solve the individual problems of each young person. With the involvement of service providers, schools, and other professionals, JCS provides counseling, treats mental health and substance abuse problems, teaches anger management and problem solving, and provides tutoring.

2010 Iowa Courts Issued

- 9,447 **no-contact** orders in domestic abuse criminal cases
- 8,652 civil **protective orders** under chapter 236 (domestic abuse)
- 516 **no-contact** orders in sexual assault criminal cases

By issuing no-contact and protective orders, courts help shield victims of violence from further harm. In short, a no-contact or protective order requires an offender to stay *away* from the person the offender harmed. Courts grant these orders in connection with criminal cases as part of an offender's pre-trial release, in civil domestic abuse actions and in dissolution of marriage cases.

Victims of Crime & Domestic Abuse

Mandatory Arrest Protective Order Registry

After a court issues a protective order, it is filed with the clerk of court. The clerk sends notice of the order to local law enforcement and transmits the information electronically to the DPS Iowa On-Line Warrants and Articles System. Established in 1995 as a joint effort of the Iowa Judicial Branch and the Iowa Department of Public Safety, the ***Registry*** *serves as a central electronic repository for all civil protective and criminal no-contact orders that require mandatory arrest for violation of the order. The purpose of the Registry is to alert law enforcement of orders and to aid clear communication of orders to protect victims and avoid mistaken arrests. This Registry is linked to the National Crime Information Center.*

Family Law

It's a sad fact of modern society that many family problems land in court for resolution. Divorce, paternity, child custody and child support actions fill a large part of our court dockets. Our courts try to give these families, especially the children involved, some measure of order amidst the turmoil.

- **11,688** dissolution cases involving children
- ***6,282*** dissolution cases not involving children
- **8,838** administrative support cases involving Child Support Recovery
- **1,762** Adoption Cases
- **7,263** *paternity* cases
- 6,885 civil ***domestic abuse*** cases

Civil Legal Actions

Our courts are the *primary avenue* Iowans take to resolve their civil legal problems, large and small. While the occasional case involving a large monetary judgment or high profile party makes the headlines, the majority of civil actions encompass **everyday problems** involving **ordinary Iowans**. Contract disputes, foreclosures, landlord-tenant cases, debt-collection actions and small claims are common.

In 2010, Iowa Courts handled:

- 12,773 mortgage foreclosure cases
- 13,321 landlord/tenant cases
- 15,706 debt collection cases
- 82,875 small claims/civil infraction cases
- 5,157 other law and equity actions
- 3,401 torts - personal injury & product liability
- 169 medical/dental malpractice cases
- 1,898 review of agency action
- 10,111 adult mental health/substance abuse commitment cases

Criminal Law

Iowa's courts play a major role in the enforcement of Iowa's criminal laws and the protection of constitutional rights. Our courts spend more time handling serious (felonies and indictable misdemeanors) criminal cases than any other type of case. Lesser offenses, including simple misdemeanors and scheduled violations, are more numerous but require less court time. Most scheduled violations are processed by clerks of court without the involvement of a judge or magistrate because, by and large, most violators pay the fines without contesting these charges.

2010

- **592,041** simple misdemeanors/scheduled violations
- **20,715 OWI** (operating while intoxicated) cases
- **45,151** aggravated and serious misdemeanors (non-OWI)
- **22,941** felonies (non-OWI)

Mission & People

Our courts have a *vital* constitutional mission:

to administer justice according to law equally to all people.

To accomplish our mission, we rely on judges, judicial magistrates and court employees who work in unison to handle hundreds of thousands of court cases and to provide a broad range of court-related services.

Judges and magistrates serve the public by using their legal skills and knowledge to impartially interpret and apply laws.

Clerks of Court and their employees manage and maintain all court records, collect and process fines, fees and restitution and transmit court information to litigants and government agencies.

Juvenile Court Officers and their employees work directly with troubled youths. Among other things, they monitor a young person's compliance with restitution and community service and arrange for services for young people.

Court Administrators help manage the business side of the courts such as human resources, accounting, purchasing and information technology.

Court Reporters keep a record of hearings and transcribe the record.

Many other employees work side-by-side with their colleagues to help fulfill the mission of the courts.

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