



## **ISACo Legislative Program FAQs**

January 4, 2024

### **Does ISACo utilize registered lobbyists?**

ISACo member counties benefit from the services of two registered lobbyists. ISACo lobbyists are full-time members of our staff and focus exclusively on county issues.

### **What is the value of ISACo's legislative program if my county already has a contract lobbyist?**

A contract lobbyist can be very effective in assisting a county with specific priorities. For example, securing grant funding, passing legislation to facilitate infrastructure projects unique to the county and working in support of specific issues of importance to county officials in that county. For this reason, retaining a contract lobbyist can provide a solid return on investment. ISACo encourages counties to retain a contract lobbyist if doing so makes sense.

The difference between ISACo's legislative program and the services provided by a contract lobbyist is a matter of focus and scope. Contract lobbyists must allocate their limited time among multiple clients across a variety of industries and interests. ISACo has one client and that client is county government. This singularity means that ISACo can focus exclusively on maintaining a more substantive engagement with the hundreds of bills that are of interest to counties, not just the handful of bills that may be priorities for a single county.

Contract lobbyists work diligently on the handful of issues for which they are assigned by the contracting county. ISACo ensures that the General Assembly and Governor are made aware of how hundreds of other bills will impact county government. This matters a lot.

Ideally, a county will maximize its influence through ISACo membership and utilization of a contract lobbyist.

### **How does ISACo formulate a legislative agenda?**

There are two components to ISACo's legislative agenda. The first component is our proactive legislative agenda that includes bills for which ISACo staff works with legislators to introduce in the General Assembly. ISACo encourages our member counties to submit legislative proposals for consideration by the Legislative Committee and Board of Directors. Proposals approved by

both the Legislative Committee and Board of Directors become ISACo's proactive legislative agenda. The second component includes our advocacy for and against legislation introduced by legislators on behalf of other organizations and interests. ISACo takes positions on many of these bills using guidance provided by our *County Platform* and member input.

### **How many bills does ISACo track?**

ISACo staff reviews every introduced bill, amendment and resolution and places legislation of interest to counties on our tracked bill list. This process takes a considerable amount of staff time but ensures that county leaders have an available resource to learn about possible changes to state law that would impact their counties. In 2023, ISACo tracked approximately 1,000 bills out of the almost 6,700 bills introduced and took official positions of support or opposition more than 100 times.

### **How is ISACo tracked legislation made available to counties?**

In 2020, ISACo invested financial resources into the development of a tracked bills feature that is available on our website.

This feature identifies all ISACo tracked legislation and allows ISACo staff to add value to the tracked bills by including our position, whether a bill would create a state mandate, preempt local authority and/or reduce county revenues. This additional information expands knowledge about each bill and strengthens our legislative advocacy efforts. Bills are searchable by typing the bill number into a field, by bill number, by policy category, by impact (state mandate, authority preemption, revenue loss, etc.) and by ISACo's position on the bill.

ISACo's tracked bill feature saves counties staff time and related costs associated with reviewing the thousands of bills introduced each year. ISACo reviews each bill and organizes them into a user-friendly and digestible format for county officials and staff.

### **How does ISACo keep county officials informed about what's happening during the legislative session?**

ISACo prioritizes frequent and regular communication with counties about legislative activity and other issues involving state and federal government. In 2023, ISACo published 41 of our *News and Views* e-newsletters. These newsletters, which are sent to officials in every Illinois county, are a valuable source of information specifically tailored toward county officials. Any county official not receiving this communication can request to be added to the distribution list by e-mailing ISACo at [info@isacoil.org](mailto:info@isacoil.org). We also encourage a quick check of your spam folder to make sure the *News and Views* e-mail isn't being blocked.

In addition to our regular communications, ISACo publishes *Position Statements*, *Fact Sheets* and *Policy Briefs*. These resources are available on our website.

### **How does ISACo determine what positions to take on legislation?**

Generally speaking, ISACo bill positions reflect ISACo's *County Platform*. Each year the ISACo Legislative Committee and Board of Directors review the *County Platform* and consider amendments as needed. The *County Platform* allows for transparency and guides ISACo staff

when evaluating and taking positions on legislation. Amendments to the *County Platform* can be offered by ISACo member counties at any time and will be placed before the Legislative Committee and Board of Directors for consideration. The *County Platform* is available on ISACo's website. ISACo also considers input from our member counties when determining positions on legislation if the *County Platform* is not clear about a specific issue.

Per ISACo's By-Laws, ISACo does not take a position on a matter unless the matter is germane to or has a direct impact on the core functions of County Government.

### **Does ISACo seek to influence legislation introduced by legislators and entities other than ISACo?**

An important aspect of ISACo's legislative program involves suggesting county-friendly amendments to introduced legislation. ISACo works with legislators and their staff members to improve various bills to benefit counties or eliminate/reduce harmful impacts.

### **What are ISACo's core tenets?**

ISACo's core tenets are included within the Association's *County Platform*. The four core tenets are local control, protecting county revenue sources, opposing unfunded mandates and promoting ethical and responsive governance.

### **Do counties in different regions have enough in common to be part of a unified legislative program?**

The belief that counties within the state's various geographic regions have little in common with respect to public policy is a myth that has undermined county unity in Illinois. A key role played by ISACo is to curate an issue set that includes the vast array of issues pertaining to the preservation of local control, protection of local revenues and freedom from unfunded state mandates. These issues are reflected within ISACo's *County Platform*.

### **What does ISACo do if counties have different positions on a legislative issue?**

On occasion, two or more counties may have a difference of opinion of how a bill may affect them. One county may support the bill while another county is opposed. In these situations, ISACo refrains from taking a position on the issue as long as we are aware of the disagreement. The exception to this restraint would be if ISACo's neutrality is contrary to an ISACo core tenet or policy position as established by the Board of Directors. In such instances, ISACo will support the *County Platform*.

### **Does ISACo take positions on legislation when disagreements exist between different county offices?**

ISACo represents counties as an institution and not specific county offices. ISACo will take positions on legislation that benefits statutory county offices, but not if the legislation is considered adverse to other county offices.

## **Does ISACo's advocacy include federal issues affecting counties?**

ISACo works closely with the National Association of Counties (NACo) to identify and advocate on federal issues pertinent to counties. ISACo communicates these issues to our members in official publications. ISACo is also the county association in Illinois that makes appointments to NACo policy steering committees. This ensures that Illinois county officials play an important role in shaping NACo's federal advocacy agenda. ISACo communicates county priorities with the Illinois Congressional Delegation.

*Please contact ISACo at [info@isacoil.org](mailto:info@isacoil.org) or 217/679-3368 if you have additional questions about our legislative program.*