

IOWA POLICE JOURNAL

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION FOR THE IOWA STATE POLICE ASSOCIATION

BOARD SPOTLIGHT

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Grassroots in legislative issues

Greetings from Dubuque. Hope you are all enjoying the warm spring days. I am writing today to talk about the importance of “grass roots” in dealing with legislative issues that are important to us in law enforcement.

You will see matters brought to your attention by an Iowa State Police Association (ISPA) board member or lobbyist in the ISPA newsletter, on the ISPA website or by an email or phone call asking you to participate in a grassroots effort to contact the legislators in your area.

What do we mean by “grassroots”?

Grassroots efforts call for all of us to contact legislators in our area and develop a relationship with them in order to be heard. We call this the “buddy system.”

A good way to do this is to contact the legislator by phone or email (both available at legis.iowa.gov/legislators) and invite them to meet you over a cup of coffee when they’re back in their home district.

Another way to meet several legislators in your area is to attend a “cracker-barrel session,” or community session, put on by various groups in your area, such as the League of Women Voters. Introduce yourself to the legislators and follow that up with a call or message.

After that, whenever you contact a “buddy legislator,” they’ll be more likely to listen to your point and understand the true details of the issue.

How does this work?

Legislators serve on behalf of their constituents (people that live in their districts). They would much rather talk to someone in their district than an ISPA board member or lobbyist.

There are times when an issue arises through a house or senate file that we feel the legislators need more information on, like how it would affect law enforcement or that citizen involvement groups are purposely putting out false information. When the ISPA board sees this occur, we make a plea to begin the grassroots effort. Talking points on the issue will be provided so you can speak with your “buddy legislator.”

Why does this work?

Legislators have told our lobbyists that they appreciate the contact by law enforcement officers to explain an issue from the law enforcement aspect.

A good example is that in legislative year 2014, there was a push by certain groups (citizen tax payer groups in the state) to change our current pension system. There was a large amount of exaggerated and false information about our current system the groups were telling the legislators. Through grassroots efforts, we were able to speak with many legislators about the actual facts, and persuade them to not change the pension systems for the time being. These tactics will be repeated by the groups wanting to change things that affect our retirement, so we need to be prepared.

In conclusion

Ideally we would like to have at least one law enforcement contact for each representative and senator. The board will encourage officers from locals in each legislative district to continue using the buddy system and request those not currently doing so to start.

Thank you all or your cooperation!

