

The Family Integrity and Medical Cannabis Patient Protection Act

Prepared for: Iowa General Assembly – Human Resources and Judiciary Committees

Author: Gina Lyn Cox, Altoona, Iowa – Constituent Advocate, Family Integrity & Medical Cannabis Policy

Date: October 25, 2025

Contact: gina.lyn.cox@gmail.com

Executive Summary

The Iowa Family Integrity and Patient Protection Initiative seeks to close a critical gap between Iowa's medical-cannabis law (§124E) and family law practices under Chapter 232. While the Iowa Medical Cannabidiol Program allows patients to legally access cannabinoid-based therapies, those same patients—especially parents, foster applicants, and guardians—remain vulnerable to discrimination in custody or placement proceedings.

This Policy Packet introduces **§124E.21A**, an amendment ensuring that lawful participation in the Iowa Medical Cannabidiol Program cannot be used as evidence of parental unfitness, nor grounds for denial of foster-care or adoption rights. The proposal is narrowly tailored to uphold Iowa's commitment to family integrity and due process, while maintaining the state's existing standards for child safety and welfare.

Policy Objectives

1. Protect lawful medical-cannabis patients from discrimination in family or child-welfare decisions.
 2. Clarify that **impairment**, not lawful medical treatment, is the proper standard for determining parental fitness.
 3. Ensure Iowa's agencies and courts apply consistent standards across counties.
 4. Safeguard confidential medical information shared under §124E.
-

Proposed Legislative Language

Amendment to Iowa Code §124E – Add new section §124E.21A

124E.21A – Protection of Parental and Caregiver Rights.

- (1) No individual shall be denied custody, guardianship, foster-care licensure, adoption eligibility, or kinship placement solely due to participation in the Iowa medical cannabidiol program.
- (2) A patient or caregiver lawfully registered under this chapter shall not be considered an unlawful drug user or unfit parent for purposes of Chapter 232 (Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare).
- (3) The Department of Health and Human Services shall adopt rules to ensure compliance and shall coordinate with the Department of Public Safety and the Board of Medicine to protect patient confidentiality in such proceedings.
- (4) Any evidence presented in child-welfare proceedings must distinguish lawful medical use

under §124E from unlawful controlled-substance use.

(5) The Iowa Attorney General shall issue interpretive guidance affirming these protections.

Implementation Plan

- 1. Legislative Action:** Introduce and refer §124E.21A to both the Human Resources and Judiciary Committees.
- 2. HHS Policy Directive:** Update administrative code to codify family-protection provisions.
- 3. Judicial Education:** Provide updated Continuing Legal Education (CLE) materials for family-court judges.
- 4. Agency Coordination:** Establish joint guidance between HHS, DPS, and the Board of Medicine.
- 5. Annual Reporting:** Require HHS to submit a yearly report to the General Assembly on compliance and outcomes.

Supporting Rationale

- Iowa's Medical Cannabidiol Program recognizes cannabis as a legitimate therapeutic tool for conditions such as epilepsy, chronic pain, PTSD, and cancer.
- Some Iowa families have experienced discrimination despite full compliance with §124E.
- Federal and state child-welfare standards emphasize the child's best interest, which is not served by penalizing lawful medical treatment.
- Aligning §124E with family law prevents arbitrary decisions and ensures consistent statewide practice.

Legal and Administrative Context

Iowa Code §124E.2 defines the medical cannabidiol program.

Iowa Code Chapter 232 governs child and family welfare proceedings.

The proposed amendment bridges these frameworks to prevent contradictory enforcement that undermines both parental rights and agency trust.

Stakeholder Impact

Stakeholder	Impact
Patients and Parents	Secures equal treatment in family and custody decisions.
Iowa HHS and Family Services	Provides clear statutory authority to uphold patient protections.
Courts and Legal Practitioners	Clarifies that lawful cannabis use is not prima facie evidence of impairment.

Stakeholder	Impact
Healthcare Providers	Protects physician-patient confidentiality under §124E.

Recommended Recipients

- Iowa House Human Resources Committee
- Iowa Senate Judiciary Committee
- Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
- Iowa Board of Medicine
- Office of the Attorney General of Iowa

Submission Guidance

Deliver or email this Policy Packet to committee members or legislative staff. Include a short cover letter summarizing the need for §124E.21A, emphasizing that it does not change criminal statutes or authorize recreational use. The amendment simply ensures Iowa families are not punished for lawful medical participation.

About the Author

Gina Lyn Cox is a constituent advocate from Altoona, Iowa, specializing in patient rights and family policy. Her advocacy focuses on bridging medical and legal frameworks to protect families navigating Iowa's medical-cannabis program. She is not affiliated with any lobbying entity and submits this proposal as a private citizen in support of evidence-based, bipartisan reform.

Prepared October 25, 2025

© 2025 Gina Lyn Cox – All rights reserved.

Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0).

Iowa Family Integrity and Patient Protection Initiative – Policy Packet

Submitted to: Iowa General Assembly – Human Resources and Judiciary Committees

Author: Gina Lyn Cox, Altoona, Iowa

Purpose: To align Iowa Code §124E with family law, ensuring lawful medical-cannabis patients are not penalized in custody, foster, or adoption cases.

Summary

This Policy Packet proposes an amendment to Iowa Code §124E to protect parents, guardians, and caregivers who are lawful participants in the Iowa Medical Cannabidiol Program. Current gaps in Iowa's child-welfare law allow the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) or the courts to consider medical-cannabis use as evidence of parental unfitness, even when use is compliant with state law. This initiative ensures that lawful medical treatment under §124E cannot be used as grounds for removal, denial of placement, or discrimination in child-custody, foster, or adoption proceedings.

Proposed Legislative Language

Amendment to Iowa Code §124E – Add new section §124E.21A

124E.21A – Protection of Parental and Caregiver Rights.

- (1) No individual shall be denied custody, guardianship, foster-care licensure, adoption eligibility, or kinship placement solely due to participation in the Iowa medical cannabidiol program.
 - (2) A patient or caregiver lawfully registered under this chapter shall not be considered an unlawful drug user or unfit parent for purposes of Chapter 232 (Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare).
 - (3) The Department of Health and Human Services shall adopt rules to ensure compliance and shall coordinate with the Department of Public Safety and the Board of Medicine to protect patient confidentiality in such proceedings.
 - (4) Any evidence presented in child-welfare proceedings must distinguish lawful medical use under §124E from unlawful controlled-substance use.
 - (5) The Iowa Attorney General shall issue interpretive guidance affirming these protections.
-

Implementation Recommendations

1. **HHS Policy Directive:** Update HHS administrative code to reflect the new §124E.21A protections.
 2. **Judicial Education:** Include guidance for family-court judges through the Iowa Judicial Branch Continuing Legal Education (CLE) system.
 3. **Agency Coordination:** Require cross-agency compliance between HHS, DPS, and the Board of Medicine to ensure patient data confidentiality.
 4. **Reporting:** HHS should provide an annual summary to the General Assembly of any custody or placement denials linked to medical-cannabis participation.
-

Rationale and Findings

- Iowa's Medical Cannabidiol Program legally recognizes cannabis as a treatment for qualifying medical conditions.
- Despite compliance with §124E, some Iowa families face custody disputes, foster-care disqualification, or loss of placement rights solely for lawful participation.

- Evidence-based research supports that lawful medical-cannabis use does not impair parental ability or safety.
 - Protecting medical patients upholds Iowa’s constitutional commitment to family integrity and due process.
-

Recommended Recipients

- **Iowa House Human Resources Committee**
 - **Iowa Senate Judiciary Committee**
 - **Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)**
 - **Iowa Board of Medicine**
-

Submission Guidance

Email or hand-deliver this packet to Iowa legislative committee chairs and members. Attach a one-page cover letter summarizing the need for §124E.21A. Highlight that this amendment does **not** alter criminal statutes or authorize recreational use; it simply ensures compliance with existing medical law does not harm family rights.

Contact:

Gina Lyn Cox

Altoona, Iowa

Constituent Advocate

Email: gina.lyn.cox@gmail.com

Date: 10/25/2025