

SENATE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE
Tuesday, February 2, 2016

ATTACHMENT 5

The Healthy Idaho Plan will save lives and money

Testimony in support of SB1205
Presented by Commissioner Tom Lamar
2 February 2016

On behalf of the:

Latah County Commission: Richard Walser, Chair, Dave McGraw, Tom Lamar
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Passing SB 1205 will save Idaho lives, and save Idaho money.

As County Commissioners, our job includes weekly meetings with the County Clerk and staff to review stacks of files pertaining to the many cases of medically indigent residents in Latah County. During this fiscal year, providing medical care to people who have no insurance will cost the taxpayers of our county about \$550,000. The remainder of the cost not covered by the county is passed along to the state Catastrophic (CAT) fund to be paid by all Idaho taxpayers.

This process is repeated throughout the other 43 counties of Idaho, to pay for the medical costs of tens of thousands of Idaho residents. An estimated 78,000 or so working Idahoans have jobs that pay so little that they can't afford health insurance and don't qualify for health insurance tax credits, but make too much to qualify for Medicaid in Idaho. Many are hardworking Idahoans stricken with serious medical problems. The combination of County indigency funds, and Idaho's CAT fund is their only avenue to pay for needed medical care when crisis arises.

It's right to help these citizens. But there's a better way to do it. Today, Idaho state policy does not fully take advantage of available funds. We need the Legislature to act. We need to pass SB 1205.

The Governor created a Medicaid Redesign Workgroup to study this issue and offer recommendations on how best to deal with the lack of access to healthcare for so many Idahoans. This group, comprised of various stakeholders and experts from the healthcare and insurance industries, as well as government representatives such as county commissioners, has twice recommended the state expand access to care utilizing available dollars to close the coverage gap.

Last February, the Workgroup presented its plan, "Healthy Idaho: An Idaho Alternative to Medicaid Expansion," to the Legislature. In March of last year, the Latah County Commissioners recommended that lawmakers pursue this plan immediately. In September, the Idaho Association of Counties general session voted overwhelmingly to support the Healthy Idaho plan.

If the Governor's Medicaid Redesign Workgroup's recommendation were implemented, medical expenses for indigent persons would be covered, along with some mental health treatment costs. Passing SB 1205 makes health care affordable for Idaho's working poor.

With the passage of SB 1205, the county indigent program and CAT program could be repealed, providing property tax relief to county and state taxpayers.

The Healthy Idaho Medicaid plan will save Idaho taxpayers millions of dollars, save lives, and reduce visits to hospital emergency rooms. We would also expect to benefit from an improvement in the health of our workforce.

Implementing the Healthy Idaho plan will bring home taxes that Idahoans are already paying to Washington DC for health care costs. These taxes paid by Idahoans should be spent in Idaho to solve Idaho problems, not spent in New York, Massachusetts, and California to help solve their health care issues. Passing SB 1205 is the right thing to do for Idaho taxpayers.

We Latah County Commissioners believe the Idaho Legislature and the Governor need to solve this problem. We need to change Medicaid eligibility rules to include the "gap population" and to increase the number of Idahoans covered by private health care management plans. Affordable health insurance coverage for every Idahoan is within reach. Let's work together to close the gap and build a healthy, compassionate Idaho. Passing SB 1205 today is the first step to making that happen.