

March 27, 2019

Chairman Fred Martin  
Senate Health & Welfare  
Statehouse  
Boise, ID 83720

Dear Chairman Martin and Members of the Committee:

The Council on Developmental Disabilities is authorized by federal and state law to monitor service systems and policies and to advocate for improved services that enable Idahoans with developmental disabilities to live meaningful lives, included in their home communities. The Council is comprised of 23 volunteers appointed by the Governor.

The Council is opposed to House Bill 277 for the following reasons:

There are currently about \*4,570 direct care workers who do not have access to affordable health insurance. About 3,980 of all direct care workers in Idaho earn less than an annual income of 138% of the federal poverty level. For an individual, this is about \$12,000 annually. Given this income, it is easy to see why they would choose to pay their rent, pay for food, gas, and utilities, and forego getting a plan on the health care exchange even with a subsidy. The high deductibles associated with those plans would prevent them from considering going to the doctor for cost saving preventative care. Excluding this segment of our workforce from Medicaid coverage will only add to a secondary coverage gap.

Why does a healthy direct care workforce matter so much for all of us, and not just the people in this category? Each and every one of us may have a family member who benefits from the services of a certified nursing assistant, a home health worker, or a personal care services worker. When my mother needed this level of care, I would have had to quit my job or take an extended leave of absence in order to meet her daily needs if it weren't for the many certified nursing assistants and the home health aids. People with disabilities and seniors rely heavily on the assistance of our direct care workforce for personal care services, meal preparation, housekeeping, and laundry, just to name a few of the many things they do daily. This important workforce makes so little in wages and the work is so undervalued that we currently have a healthcare worker shortage.

This legislation pushes the availability of a healthy direct care workforce even farther away from possibility. This segment of our workforce are often the unsung heroes who assist individuals to be able to age in place in their homes and avoid costly institutional living options.

Thank you for considering the Council's comments.

Sincerely,

Christine Pisani, Executive Director



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