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AAUW- Idaho Testimony in Support of Closing the Gap

Good Afternoon, Chairman & Healthcare Alternatives Committee:

My name is Sylvia Chariton and I represent the American Assn. of University Women of Idaho (AAUW). AAUW - Idaho fully supports closing Idaho's coverage gap. Since AAUW largely represents women, this brief testimony will be female specific.

According to recent Idaho statistics, females are 55 percent of the Medicaid Gap population. Because women are more likely than men to be covered as dependents, a woman is at a greater risk of losing her insurance if she becomes widowed or divorced, if her spouse loses his job, or her spouse's employer drops family coverage or increases premiums and out-of-pocket costs to unaffordable levels.

Based on information from a recent Kaiser Study, the gap in private sector and publicly funded programs left 18% of Idaho women uninsured. Also, we know that low income working women, women of color as well as single women are at a greater risk of being uninsured.

According to Kaiser, these marginalized women have inadequate access to care, get a lower standard of care when they are in the health system, and have poorer health outcomes. Compared with women with insurance, uninsured women have lower use of important preventative



services such as mammograms, pap tests and are two to three times as likely to forgo medical services due to cost.

Poor women from rural areas are even more disenfranchised since there is a provider shortage in those areas. Some of these Idaho communities have fallen so far through the cracks that it feels like the rest of the state has left them behind. For example, the poverty level in Madison County is 27.1 percent; by comparison the poverty level in Ada County is 11.6 percent. The rural enclaves of Owyhee, Latah and Shoshone Counties sustain poverty levels that hover around twice what Ada County experiences. Many Idaho low income women, many of whom labor daily as low wage workers have been the needless victims of bad policy and shortsighted decisions. These people live lives of quiet desperation.

When these disenfranchised folks end up in our Emergency Departments, Idahoans already pay for their bills either through cost shifting at the hospitals or through their county's Catastrophic Fund using our tax payer dollars. These unfortunate circumstances create an unquantifiable risk factor that hurts everyone.

It even hurts businesses, what you see is civil malaise. And from the number of folks here today, it appears pretty pervasive. This chronic civil malaise over healthcare creates instability in Idaho and makes it less attractive to new businesses considering a move here.

Finally, since these Gap folks have no lobby, no power, no voice and certainly no money; let us serve as their advocates. Please take action and Close the Gap!!

Respectfully submitted,

Sylvia Chariton