

Good afternoon,

My name is Toni Lawson and I am the Vice President of Government Relations for the Idaho Hospital Association. We represent Idaho's 44 community hospitals, including 17 county and district hospitals.

We believe this bill is premature for a number of reasons, and would ask that you hold it in committee.

As I imagine you are all aware, we are about to undertake some significant changes to the way we provide healthcare coverage in Idaho. As of today, we don't know what those changes are going to look like. There are still a lot of unanswered questions.

We were recently asked to provide input on this legislation and to develop amendments for consideration. It is a complex issue that must take into account local, state and federal elements...private and government payers...and in a number of cases, no payers. We are struggling to find appropriate amendment language that doesn't simply shift the responsibility of what the legislature and courts have determined to be the responsibility of the counties on to the hospitals.

We have concerns that, as drafted, this language simply allows counties to temporarily "furlough" a prisoner from custody, order them to go the local hospital for care, and take them back into custody once that care has been given. In addition to the obvious concerns about cost of care, this also raises questions of safety and security for our hospitals, their staff and patients. (We know this will happen because some counties are attempting to do it now.)

It is my understanding that, when the court came down with the decision this bill is intended to address, it considered several sections of code to come to their conclusion. This only modifies one section of code. We don't know that there won't be unintended consequences in other sections.

It's challenging to come up with alternative language at this time because we don't know what components of a possible solution will still be on the table to consider:

- What's the future of Medicaid expansion?
- What will enrollment and coverage look like? Could these cases qualify for Medicaid?
- What's the future of the county indigent program?
- What's the future of the Catastrophic Healthcare Plan?

We need to wait until Medicaid is sorted out, until questions of the indigency program are resolved and until determination of the future of the CAT fund is resolved. With so many moving parts, this is not the time to add more.

I am sympathetic to the impact of the cost of medical care on the county budget. This bill doesn't solve the problem of payment for care in these cases, it simply says it's not the Sheriffs' problem any more.

We are certainly willing to sit down over the interim and discuss solutions to this issue. We would respectfully ask that you hold this bill in committee and give us time to determine what elements can actually be included in a solution.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.