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March 27, 2019

Good morning, Chairman Martin and members of the committee,

My name is Ceci Thunes, and I represent the Idaho Behavioral Health Alliance. We are a statewide network dedicated to transforming Idaho's behavioral health system through consumer advocacy. I presented testimony at the Joint Health and Welfare session and the subsequent committee hearings related to Medicaid expansion. You've heard all of us as we offered an array of arguments for a clean bill. Like many others, I've spoken on behalf of people with mental health and substance use disorders and why various government intrusions into personal lives, or as some people call them, "sideboards," present extra unnecessary challenges for people who are already trying to manage complex behavioral health conditions.

We've talked a lot, and the message is consistent. People all over the state want a clean bill. I recognize that many of you may be tired of hearing from those who live in or around Boise. However, Idaho Code 56-267, or Medicaid expansion, was made law by citizens of more than 75% of the RURAL counties in Idaho, and they knew what they were voting for. You've seen the recent polling confirming that. People who speak against sideboards absolutely represent the voices of Idahoans in all areas of the state—rural, urban, and suburban. For this reason we are compelled to return to the Statehouse, because of legislation that purports to stand up for common sense, prudent spending, and a light touch of government.

Today we have a new analysis of what this bill will cost the state. \$32 million more a year than a simple implementation. And it will cost much more than that, because people without insurance will still access healthcare when they need it. This is even more so for people facing mounting behavioral health conditions. Crisis treatment often extends beyond emergency rooms and crisis centers into the criminal justice system and the courts. We pay for all of that.

Considering that, I'm struggling to understand how this legislation aligns with fiscal conservatism. HB277 adds 19 additional state employees, substantially growing a government department that is already the state's largest agency, whether we're comparing annual budgets or the number of fulltime employees. As a matter of fact, the additional bureaucracy alone in this bill will cause the state to hire more full time employees than they needed to as a result of the entire Jeff D lawsuit settlement. As you'll recall, that began in the 1980s and brought forth a massive overhaul of the children's mental health program and has a multi-year implementation process. This mechanism to monitor work hour requirements will cost exponentially more than if we offer a lighter hand of government like work promotion.

A voluntary work promotion program has huge returns on investment, because it gets people to work and making more money. Our friends in Montana have modeled that. People will voluntarily pull themselves up by their boot straps, including people with mental health and substance use disorders, but only if they're healthy enough to work and have access to professional opportunities. That should be common sense for all of us.

Please say no to HB 277, and any legislation that doesn't start with those basic assumptions.

Thank you.

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