

MINUTES
SENATE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE

DATE: Monday, January 26, 2026
TIME: 3:00 P.M.
PLACE: Room WW54
MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair VanOrden, Vice Chair Bjerke, Senators Harris, Zuiderveld, Lenney, Shippy, Blaylock, Keyser, and Wintrow
ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None
NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chair VanOrden** called the meeting of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee (Committee) to order at 3:01 p.m.

GUBERNATORIAL REAPPOINTMENT: **Committee Consideration of the Gubernatorial Reappointment of Clayton Steele of Lewiston, Idaho, to the Board of Environmental Quality to serve a term commencing July 1, 2025 and expiring July 1, 2029**
Mr. Steele informed the Committee he had been working in the environmental sciences field for 25 years, half of that time was spent working for the Department of Environmental Quality in Lewiston. He had served on the Board of Environmental Quality (Board) for two years. During that time he was involved in the rulemaking process and worked in private industry for Clearwater Paper as an environmental manager. **Mr. Steele** stated he was the air quality manager in Lewiston.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Harris** asked about key challenges faced by the Board in the past two years. **Mr. Steele** explained the Perpetua Resources contested case was a challenge as was reviewing administrative rules.

Senator Wintrow asked what parts of serving on the Board were rewarding and what purpose the Board served. **Mr. Steele** stated he brought a unique perspective to the Board due to his experience working for the Idaho Department of Equality (DEQ). He understood the process of permitting as well as what it was like to be regulated. He stated his time working internally at DEQ enabled him to explain certain things to other board members. **Mr. Steele** explained a source of pride was ensuring funds reached local communities through rural grants and loan approvals. He saw clear impacts of this effort in the Lewiston region and across the state.

Senator Blaylock asked Mr. Steele his opinion on the Perpetua Resources situation and if there were any updates on the project. She stated the federal government approved it and now they were waiting for state regulation. **Mr. Steele** responded the case was contested and went to a hearing officer. The hearing officer made a recommendation to the Board who reviewed a high volume of complex records. The Board decided unanimously to proceed with the hearing officer's recommendation and the case had since moved to a different jurisdiction.

Senator Zuiderveld asked if Mr. Steele ever encountered a conflict of interest working for Clearwater Paper and serving on the Board. **Mr. Steele** stated he had not yet experienced a conflict of interest serving on the Board.

PRESENTATION: Department of Health and Welfare Budget

Chair VanOrden stated the Legislative Services Office (LSO) would present the 2027 budget requests for the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) excluding Medicaid which would be covered on Thursday.

Alex Williamson, Senior Budget and Policy Analyst for LSO and **Morgan Poloni**, Senior Budget and Policy Analyst for LSO, presented the 2027 budget requests for IDHW excluding Medicaid (Attachment 1). **Ms. Williamson** stated the Legislative Budget Book included IDHW's FY 27 budget request beginning on page 2-3. She explained the slides provided to the Committee were for reference and offered to discuss any questions with the Committee.

Ms. Poloni reviewed the following divisions and programs that requested no enhancements or supplemental funds and were considered only a maintenance budget for FY 27:

- Youth Safety and Permanency
- Licensing and Certification
- Independent Councils

Ms. Poloni reviewed the following divisions and programs that requested enhancement or supplement to their budgets for FY 27:

- Early Learning and Development
- Family and Community Partnerships
- Division of Public Health Services

DISCUSSION:

Senator Blaylock asked for clarification regarding the Idaho Home Visiting Program budget. **Ms. Poloni** explained the Idaho Home Visiting Program was a one-time appropriation last year intended to spur IDHW to review the program and request funds in FY 27. It was previously an ongoing appropriation. There were two parts to the requested budget. The general fund transfer of \$1 million which would be used as part of the 3 percent hold back and the federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funding. The MIECHV grant was part of ongoing federal appropriation. Additionally, the program would be moved to the Division of Early Learning and Development.

Chair VanOrden clarified the Idaho Home Visiting Program would be moved to a different division within IDHW, not out of IDHW. **Ms. Poloni** stated that was correct.

Senator Wintrow asked where the 3 percent hold back came from. **Ms. Poloni** replied it was part of the overall program. **Senator Wintrow** explained the Legislature appropriated \$1 million to the IDHW as pass-through funding to health districts for the Idaho Home Visiting Program. She stated the Legislature voted to make the appropriation ongoing to ensure money was allocated to this prevention program. **Senator Wintrow** asserted she would like to investigate the 3 percent hold back on this fund because there were no guarantees on the federal funding for the program.

PRESENTATION:

Ms. Williamson stated Substance Abuse Services requested no enhancements or supplemental funds and were considered only a maintenance budget for FY 27. She added the program requested \$150,000 from the Millennium Fund for a recovery center in Idaho.

Ms. Williamson reviewed the following divisions and programs that requested enhancement or supplement to their budgets for FY 27:

- Division of Welfare
- Mental Health Services
- Psychiatric Hospitalization
- Indirect Support Services

Ms. Williamson also highlighted that Idaho was awarded \$925 million from the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP) over five years.

DISCUSSION:

Chair VanOrden stated the RHTP had strict deadlines for submitting a proposals. Once a proposal was submitted the State must use the funds within a two year period otherwise the funds would revert back to the federal government. The first proposal was due in October. **Ms. Williamson** added the funds that revert back would be redistributed to states that were executing their plans. Therefore, if Idaho was diligent about implementing a plan, obligating funds, and utilizing those funds, there was potential Idaho would receive additional funds over the life time of the grant.

Chair VanOrden explained the RHTP included a 3.5 percent allocation to the tribes, who are eligible to apply for additional money through the same process the State would undergo.

Senator Zuiderveld asked for examples of operating expenditures because the program allocated \$ 294 million, one time, for operating expenditures. **Ms. Williamson** explained the scope of the funds was intended for access issues, expanding or enhancing services, and technology or infrastructure investments that would have a sustainable impact beyond the life time of the program.

Chair VanOrden added there were administrative costs the allocation would cover. Idaho was allocated \$185 million and one of the priorities would be bolstering rural Emergency Medical Services to expand health care in rural communities.

Senator Lenney stated it would be helpful to have someone from IDHW available to answer questions on the budget requests.

ADJOURNED:

There being no further business at this time, **Chair VanOrden** adjourned the meeting at 3:47 p.m.

Senator VanOrden
Chair

Madyson Crea
Secretary