



Tara Rowe, SILC Chair
Mel Leviton, SILC Executive Director

February 12, 2026

Senate Health and Welfare Committee
Re.: Senate Bill 1267

Chairwoman VanOrden and Members of the Committee:

The Idaho State Independent Living Council (SILC) serves to educate policy makers, including the Governor, the Idaho Legislature and local officials on public policy issues that impact people with disabilities, regardless of age or the type of disability through the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, Idaho Statute, Title 56 Chapter 12 and the 2025-2027 State Plan for Independent Living.

The SILC is committed to ensuring that Idahoans with disabilities can live the lives they choose with the support they need to live in their own homes, avoiding dehumanizing and costly institutional care. The Medicaid for Workers with Disabilities program offers one path to greater independence. The Idaho program became law in 2006 through H664 after nearly eleven (11) years' work by stakeholders, including one of my predecessors, Kelly Buckland. It became a viable option in 1999 when the federal Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act was passed allowing states the option of offering a Medicaid Buy-In program to working individuals who, if not for their increased incomes, would be Medicaid eligible due to a disabling condition.

At the time of passage, I worked at the state Protection and Advocacy System where, among other activities, we worked with stakeholders, people with disabilities, Medicaid and the Social Security Administration to provide education about this groundbreaking program and the opportunities it provided to increase incomes and improve outcomes – A way to break the cycle of poverty for people with disabilities who relied on Medicaid for critical support to live at home and were able to secure work.

Through the Medicaid for Workers with Disabilities program, Idahoans with disabilities pay a sliding scale premium for Medicaid coverage. It is critical to understand that even today, the only coverage for long-term in home support is through Medicaid. While people who have a permanent disability qualify for Medicare after two years, Medicare and private health insurance do not cover long-term, in home support such as help with personal hygiene, getting dressed, transferring from bed to wheelchair, preparing meals or eating.

Through the years, including the past year, we've worked well with the Department of Health and Welfare Self-Reliance and Medicaid program staff, beneficiaries and other stakeholders to make improvements to the process for getting into and staying in the program.

Early participants in the Idaho Medicaid for Workers program have paid their premiums; reduced their reliance on other public programs such as supplemental food, housing and energy assistance; paid income taxes and achieved self-sufficiency in a way they once only dreamed of doing. And yet, now many are at a precipice, having turned 65, still working and no longer eligible for a program that didn't foresee them working past age 64. They face premiums for care they must have without the help of the sliding scale that made work and independence possible.

Additionally, the assets they've built - up to \$10,000 for a single person - have become a liability in a Medicaid program that only allows \$2000 in total assets. Furthermore, some who worked as long as they could built retirement, home equity, a good life that we all aspire to and now face an insurmountable share of cost, upwards of \$3000+, for in-home support while trying to maintain the mortgage, home maintenance and expensive repairs on vans to get them where they're going.

More than twenty (20) states include people over age 64 in their Medicaid for Workers programs, including some of our neighbors. The recent passage of H.R. 7148, the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2026 at the federal level, will remove the upper age limit no later than January 1, 2028. Because of the work already done, we have an opportunity to develop and submit a state plan amendment to allow Workers with Disabilities who are over the age of 64 sooner rather than later.

In the last twenty years, I have worked with people who have used the program from its infancy and encouraged young people to use it without fear of losing their independence. The Medicaid for Workers with Disabilities program provides more than hope. It provides the tangible means for people with significant disabilities to earn a living while maintaining lifesaving home and community based support. Senate Bill 1267 provides the mechanisms we need to stand by the pioneers of the program by removing the upper age limit in a way that works for working Idahoans with disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Mel Leviton, Executive Director
Idaho State Independent Living Council