

Idaho House panel kills bill because of Sharia law worries

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — An Idaho House panel voted 9-8 on Friday to kill legislation to bring the state into compliance with federal child-support collection rules after some lawmakers said they were concerned about Sharia law influencing Idaho's enforcement authority.

Idaho child support program director Kandace Yearsley said the committee's decision has placed Idaho at risk of losing nearly \$46 million in federal child-support funding as well as access to the federal enforcement tools used to collect child-support payments from parents living in other states.

But some members of the House committee said they were concerned the bill was tied to an international convention regarding cross-border recovery of child-support payments. Rep. Heather Scott and Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll, both Republicans, said they feared the bill could force Idaho to enforce child-support rulings made under Islamic law or foreign tribunals.

"There is no specific language in the bill that would protect the rights of those dealing with parentage, child support and support orders from a foreign country that would contradict our laws here," Nuxoll said, adding she would change her vote on the bill to "no" if she could. "There are other countries listed in the treaty — France, Belgium— that have recognized sharia courts as quasi-courts. So I just feel that you should be aware of those facts."

Deputy Attorney General Scott Keim countered during Friday's meeting that none of the countries involved in the Hague Convention on International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance —which Idaho entered into in 2007— are under Sharia law.

"I don't know of any other state going through this," said Yearsley, visibly shocked minutes after the committee voted. "There's no prior case. We are the first."

Yearsley added that the committee's actions not only risk Idaho losing access to state enforcement tools but also risks the United States from being disqualified from the convention. This is because the convention requires that all states agree to be in compliance in order to participate, she said.

According to a letter from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, roughly \$16.1 million will immediately stop once Idaho is out of compliance. An additional \$30 million is also in jeopardy because compliance is also tied to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

The committee's surprise decision comes in the final hours of this year's legislative session. The issue remained securely under the radar, clearing the Senate unanimously, until concerns over the bill came to a head just as legislative leaders were scrambling to adjourn.

House Speaker Scott Bedke, R-Oakley, said leadership would not introduce new legislation Friday evening in order to save SB 1067.

"I don't see it delaying the session," Bedke said. "It stands as of right now."

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