

Testimony to the Senate Health & Welfare Committee on SB 1142

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Good Afternoon, Chairman Heider, and members of the Committee. I am Lauren Necochea, director of Idaho Voices for Children.

Thank you for working toward a solution for our fellow Idahoans -- Idahoans who are working to climb the economic ladder, but get knocked down by illnesses and hospitalizations that could be manageable with comprehensive coverage. Families facing a dreadful medical emergency worry simultaneously about the potential financial ruin.

I am particularly grateful to the bill's sponsors, whom I admire and respect, for rolling up their sleeves to solve an important problem. Healthcare was one of Idahoans' top priorities in a recent Boise State opinion survey. Thank you for making it your priority.

I stand before you as a voice for children and families and in Idaho. Therefore, it is my job to say that this legislation does not go far enough. Until we leverage the dollars available for Idaho to expand coverage, we can't solve a major problem in our state's health care system.

It feels like we've been sitting at a train station and for four years, the train has pulled up to the station and Idaho has let it go by. While families are facing the grave consequences of these delays, there's been another problem with waiting. The trains coming in the future may not take us as far as we'd like to go. They may be less cost-effective for our state. That makes all the more urgent to act today.

We can't say for certain what the next wave of national healthcare reform will look like. But there is a consistent theme in the debate that Congress is having: a strong preference given to states that have expanded Medicaid.

The bill released this week by the House GOP demonstrates this preference, as it keeps the expansion's enhanced match in place through 2019. It is also clear this is the floor for how the Medicaid expansion will be treated. A number of Republican senators have expressed that the House bill doesn't do enough for expansion states, and they hope to make improvements if it is passed out of the House.

Our wait-and-see approach put us in a low-priority position in the first serious proposal to reform the Affordable Care Act. To continue to wait-and-see is the riskiest approach today, from both a fiscal standpoint and when you think about the lives of Idahoans that are on the line.

If we get on the train today, we can always get off the farther down the line. We can opt out or back-track if the math doesn't work out. Expanding coverage today will allow us to

experiment with managed care and value-based purchasing to maximize health outcomes for our dollar.

I urge you to consider how we can amend this bill to best protect Idaho's healthcare future during this session. It's time for Idaho to get on the train. It might be the last one.