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## **Health Care Leaders Speak in Opposition to Work Reporting Requirements Prior to First Public Hearing**

BOISE, ID – Immediately prior to the first public hearing regarding Idaho’s pending application to add work reporting requirements to voter approved Medicaid expansion, health care leaders from Close the Gap Idaho explained how the policy would be harmful to thousands of Idahoans set to receive health coverage this January. Lauren Necochea, director of Idaho Voices for Children, and Dr. Lesleigh Box, a practicing Boise physician who serves as the Health Policy Chair for the Idaho Chapter of the American College of Physicians and as a member of Idaho Doctors and Nurses for Health Care, outlined the harmful impacts to Idahoans if the proposal is approved by the federal government.

“The proposed policies will result in thousands of Idahoans losing their health coverage--as the state acknowledges in its application,” explained Lauren Necochea. “When a family hits hard times and a breadwinner loses a job or has hours cut, this is incredibly stressful for the entire family. Losing medical care at this moment only compounds stress and hardship, making it harder for families to get back on their feet,” Necochea continued.

Work reporting requirements are not only costly and ineffective—they lead to dangerous coverage losses. New Hampshire delayed implementation of work reporting requirements when the state realized that 17,000 people would lose health coverage in the first month, mostly as a result of not knowing they needed to report their hours. In Arkansas, over 18,000 enrollees lost their Medicaid coverage in less than six months. The majority of those people remain uninsured today. Work reporting requirements have been deemed illegal in every state that has attempted to implement them.

Idaho’s draft application indicates that approximately 18 percent, or 16,000 of the 91,000 Idahoans expected to enroll in expanded Medicaid could lose coverage. Applying the coverage loss rate of 23 percent that Arkansas experienced, however, suggests that closer to 21,000 Idahoans would lose health coverage. The actual number of Idahoans who are barred from enrolling or lose coverage will likely be even higher because Idaho’s policy is considerably harsher than Arkansas—with enrollees losing coverage after just one month of missing paperwork deadlines. In contrast, Arkansas

had a “three strikes you’re out” policy – only terminating coverage after three months of noncompliance.

“In Idaho’s proposal, missing a single monthly report or having insufficient hours in just one month will mean loss of coverage. This is a *one-strike, you’re out* rule,” Necochea said.

“Mandating employment will not allow a sick person to heal. Making a sick person well will allow them to work,” explained Dr. Box.

Shared during today’s press conference was the story of Joyce Witzel, from Kuna, who is set to benefit from Medicaid expansion when coverage begins this coming January. Mrs. Witzel was unable to attend the press conference in person because she was working. In her formal remarks shared with the media on her behalf, Mrs. Witzel explained, “My husband and I both work part time. Sometimes we get 30 hours and other times it’s barely 15. We have no control over our work schedules. Work reporting requirements won’t help me get more hours at my job. They won’t help me access treatment for my arthritis. But if paperwork falls through the cracks, or my employer doesn’t schedule me enough hours, I could be penalized by losing my health coverage and therefore access to care for my arthritis that would make me healthier to work.”

The first of two required public hearings on Idaho’s 1115 Work Requirement waiver application will take place from 1-3 pm on Tuesday, September 3rd in the Lincoln Auditorium of the Idaho Statehouse. The second hearing takes place on Friday, September 6th from 1-3 pm in the Joe R. Williams Building, 700 W. State Street, Boise.

The public comment period for the 1115 work requirement waiver application is open until September 22, 2019. Idahoans are encouraged to comment using the Close the Gap Idaho comment tool at: <https://www.closesthegapidaho.org/take-action/take-email-action/>

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**About Close the Gap Idaho:** Close the Gap Idaho is a network of over 5,000 organizations and individuals statewide, working to support a complete solution to the coverage gap and to preserve health coverage for Idahoans. Close the Gap Idaho has led the effort to expand Medicaid in Idaho since 2014. A list of Close the Gap Idaho steering committee members can be found on the Close the Gap Idaho website.