May 19, 2020

Office of the Governor
700 W Jefferson St
Boise, ID 83702

Sent via email: governor@gov.idaho.gov

Dear Governor Little,

Thank you for your strong leadership for the state of Idaho during these difficult times caused by COVID-19. We know you are faced with extremely unprecedented challenges and are having to make hard decisions every day. We applaud your efforts to slow the spread of the coronavirus and protect the citizens of Idaho. To further these efforts, it is imperative that Medicaid be exempt from any budget cuts as we navigate this public health crisis.

DisAbility Rights Idaho (DRI) is Idaho’s designated Protection and Advocacy System for people with disabilities. As an agency we assist people with disabilities to protect, promote and advance their legal and human rights, through quality legal, individual, and system advocacy. We want to help individuals with disabilities get the services and treatment they need to lead independent lives in the community.

As state revenues fall, we understand that state agencies are being asked to identify ways to cut budgets. We are deeply concerned about what cuts to the Medicaid budget would mean for beneficiaries’ health, financial stability and access to health coverage and care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Historically, Medicaid has played a key role in helping states respond to emergencies and recessions, providing flexible funding and offsetting expenses. As COVID-19 takes its toll on the health of Idahoans and causes people to lose job-based health coverage, Medicaid is helping families get through these tough times. Access to Medicaid coverage improves public health, improves access to care especially in rural areas, and provides essential coronavirus testing, treatment and telehealth services to vulnerable populations. By keeping more people insured through Medicaid, Idaho will keep health care costs down statewide by reducing uncompensated care costs.

Individuals with disabilities rely on Medicaid to obtain community based supports that allow them to live in the community rather than institutions. We understand that COVID-19 is hitting institutions like nursing homes and intermediate care facilities especially hard. If Medicaid’s budget is cut, it is likely that community based supports will be among the
first services to be reduced. This will result in the individuals relying on those supports being faced with the prospect of entering an institutional setting to get the services and supports they need. Not only will they be losing out on the quality of life advantages that integration in the community provides but they will also be at increased risk of becoming infected with COVID-19. Moreover, many of our clients who live in rural areas utilize community based supports to stay close to their families. Should these community based supports be removed, institutional placements are often tens to hundreds of miles away thus further isolating individuals with disabilities, increasing anxiety and breaking up families.

Cuts to Medicaid’s budget would result in cuts to essential services that keep Idahoans healthy and layoffs for crucial administrative staff who efficiently run the program. For every dollar cut from the state’s Medicaid budget, we stand to lose $2.37 in federal funding. According to the Maintenance of Effort provision in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, Medicaid beneficiaries cannot lose coverage or experience any cuts to services without Idaho losing the increased federal funding designed to provide financial relief during this public health emergency. Any cuts to the Medicaid budget would mean cuts to the benefits and services Idahoans rely on for health coverage.

At a time when access to critical and life-saving medical services is paramount for our most vulnerable neighbors, friends and relatives, Medicaid’s role is more important than ever. We ask that you hold Medicaid harmless and exempt it from any budget cuts. Thank you for your consideration and please contact us if you have questions about potential impacts that cuts to Medicaid would have on Idahoans with disabilities. Together, we must keep Medicaid strong.

Sincerely,

Amy Cunningham
Acting Executive Director/Legal Director
DisAbility Rights Idaho

AC/ds