Kearnes sees rough times for relief cases

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BOISE — State Rep. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls, chairman of the House Health and Welfare Commit tee, doesn't see any good news for the thousands on relief and who are recipients on the Department of Health and Welfare programs.

Mrs. Kearnes, known throughout the State Legislature as the champion for people programs — those for people on welfare and health care rolls — said a so-called CAVE committee appointed by House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, has been created to look at the Department of Health and Welfare.

She said in a Post-Register interview this committee headed by Rep. Jack Kennevick, R-Boise, has come up with a number of recommendations to make it even tougher for welfare and health clients.

One of its recommendations is to consolidate the public health districts with the DHW.

She said a bill sponsored by Rep. Morgan Munger, R-Ola, calling for a year's moratorium on Public Health Districts is held in her desk. She said it likely will stay there unless there is a demand for action by some legislator, although she does not foresee that.

Munger underwent a kidney stone operation 10 days ago but expects to return to the Legislature this week.

"Such a bill," said Mrs. Kearnes, "would kill the health districts because if they are closed for a year it is unlikely they could be re-established."

Mrs. Kearnes said there is a feeling around the Legislature that if there are any cuts they should take place in DHW.

She hastened to point out that many forget DHW is funded two thirds by the federal government.

"It means that for every dollar the state fails to appropriate, it loses $2 in federal money," said Mrs. Kearnes. "We should be careful on what we cut.

Mrs. Kearnes said she is more worried about wha takes place on the federal government level in the fie of welfare and relief. A cutback on the national lev could adversely affect the state programs so that could bring suffering to many people.

"The national laws have much to do with the ave age person on welfare," she said. "The ones who a cut and who suffer most are the sick, blind, old and t crippled children. These are the people who can't a ford the reductions."

Mrs. Kearnes noted the Joint Finance Appropri tion Committee failed to give supplemental fundi for the Aid to Dependent Children program. As a r sult, there will be further cuts starting next mont with a mother and two children to get only $240 month.