

Indigent health care bill pushed

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BOISE — Although time is fast running out, Chuck Holden, executive director of the Idaho Association of Counties, is hopeful of pushing through an indigent medical bill that will ease the crushing financial burden for many counties.

Holden said in a Post-Register interview that previous legislation has received less than enthusiastic response. His House Bill 310 calls for all of the original provisions except it limits property tax certification to the actual expense of the prior year.

"It will require counties to operate on registered warrants which will carry interests of 10 to 13 percent," said Holden. "It does have that problem but we are asking for comments to see if action can be taken."

The bill is under consideration this week in the House Health and Welfare Committee.

Holden said key provisions call for partial payments for indigent medical care after an investigation of the income capabilities of the applicant; that the reimbursement rules be based on the same formula as for Medicaid and Medicare; and clarifying a constitutional question regarding compliance with the federal rules.

Holden said counties have pushed for a clause requiring indigent patients to pay at least a part of their bills to help defray the rising indigent costs which have almost threatened to bankrupt some counties.

Generally the federal rates vary among hospitals but they average about 15 percent in Idaho.