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Bill would require midwife licensing

Licenses would likely cost at least \$450 a year and save taxpayers money, an advocate for the legislation says.

After being slapped down last year, Idaho midwives are going back to the Legislature to push for a new bill that would require everyone who delivers babies to have a license or face penalties. A bill that failed in last year's legislative session would have made licensing voluntary.

"That's the biggest change this year," said state Rep. Janice McGeachin, R-Idaho Falls, who will help shepherd the bill. "If they want to practice, they will have to meet the standards."

Under the proposal, midwives would have to pass a \$1,500 test and receive certification from the North American Registry of Midwives.

Training at a certified school can take three to five years and cost up to \$30,000, said Michelle Bartlett, certified professional midwife and vice president of an Idaho midwifery council. In some cases, women or men who have been practicing as midwives for years may receive certification without going back to school.

The state has about 40 midwives, 25 to 30 of whom already have earned certification. Idaho has about 10 registered nurses who also deliver babies, but they are licensed under nursing rules and would not need additional certification. Idaho does not have a registry-certified school. Some midwives learn through correspondence courses before they take the registry's test.

The licenses, expected to cost \$450 to \$500 a year, would be administered through the state Bureau of Occupational Licenses, which also licenses counselors, barbers and other professionals. Delivering babies without a license would become a misdemeanor for a first or second offense, Bartlett said.

Last year's bill raised the hackles of some doctors and hospital officials. Some feared that unlicensed midwives without good credentials were injuring or even inadvertently killing women or their babies. "They are headed in the right direction," said Steve Millard, president of the Idaho Hospital Association.

About 24 states have special licensing for midwives who are not nurses. Twenty-two have mandatory licensing. Neighboring Oregon and Utah have voluntary licensing. Licensing midwives will save taxpayers money, Bartlett said. A hospital birth costs up to \$10,000, and a home birth \$2,500 to \$3,500, advocates said. That would help Medicaid, a government health insurance program for the poor, which paid for about one-third of all the births in Idaho in 2006.