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Medicaid rule allows benefits without citizenship verification for 90 days

The Idaho Senate approved a rule last week that would allow Medicaid enrollees 90 days to prove their U.S. citizenship or be removed from the program. The Senate Health and Welfare Committee gave the rule a 7-2 vote of approval.

Tom Shanahan, spokesman for the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, the agency that administers Medicaid, says his department is simply adapting to federal guidelines, as well as allowing applicants time to find their missing birth certificates.

Sen. Steve Vick, R-Hayden Lake, is one lawmaker who is opposed to the change. **Vick, who** sits on the Senate Health and Welfare Committee, was absent for the vote on the rule. He told *IdahoReporter.com* that if he been present he would have voted against the measure. “The reason I opposed **it is that** the old rule said that if you couldn’t prove citizenship, then you weren’t eligible,” said Vick. “I think the burden should be on you.”

Vick pointed out that some people might use the rule to continually changes names, receive 90 days of Medicaid coverage, and have all their medical problems continually paid for by taxpayers. Shanahan said that if the department found out it was lied to by an illegal Medicaid enrollee, the agency would take legal action against that person. “... If this were to happen we would pursue the individual for fraud,” Shanahan concluded. Vick said he was told otherwise and that the agency wouldn’t be able to recover the funds from the offender.

Shanahan told *IdahoReporter.com* in an e-mail that obtaining a birth certificate can take three months – in other states. “For some states, it can take almost the full 90 days to get a certified copy,” Shanahan. Additionally, he noted, there are other life situations that can cause a delay in processing, such as a marriage not being listed on an application. And while Idaho is conforming to federal standards, do Idahoans really need 90 days to obtain copies of their birth certificates? Maybe, especially if enrollees weren’t born in the Gem State.

A clerk with the Bureau of Vital Statistics told *IdahoReporter.com* that the agency typically provides copies of the documents within five to seven business days. Because the agency asks for written requests for certificates through the U.S. mail and also provides the documents the same way, it can add a few days to the process. It looks as though the whole procedure can be accomplished in less than three weeks, at least for those people born in Idaho. In other states, however, the process can take a full 90 days. In California, for example, those born prior to 1982 are likely to receive their documents a full 10 weeks – or 70 days – after the initial request is made. In New York, requests made by mail can take anywhere between six to eight weeks, though Internet or phone orders for documents are processed within a week.

But would it be possible, under the guideline, for someone in the country illegally to enroll in and stay on Medicaid for 90 days? Shanahan says yes, but it would require some dishonesty on that person’s part. “It is possible, but only if the person in question was untruthful and actively told the department that they were a citizen,” said Shanahan, adding that agency officials have never seen this scenario occur.