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by **Bill Dentzer**
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Senate leaders ask for two options as they look at bills to address faith-healing exemptions

Idaho Senate leaders have asked a colleague to draft two bill options to address the faith-healing exemptions in state law that child advocates say exonerate parents if they choose prayer over medical care and their children die.

Sen. Dan Johnson, R-Lewiston, who co-chaired a legislative work group on the subject last summer, declined Friday to outline the options he drafted but said they are among the five he and several other senators gave to leadership in a letter last week.

“I can tell you that there are differences of opinion, so that’s why there are two (options),” Johnson said. “We’re to that point now, but it is progress. We’re talking about this. It’s been a lot of work.”

The options range from no action to modifying or removing exemptions in criminal and civil law or adding reporting requirements.

All of them rely in one way or another for enforcement on the another part of the state law, the Free Exercise of Religion Act passed in 2000. That law is, by default, the current governing statute in such cases, making state courts the case-by-case arbiter of parental rights and responsibilities. But there is no state legal standard for charging anyone with a crime, so any legal cases involving faith-healing arrive in court by roundabout means.

Senate President Pro Tem Brent Hill, R-Rexburg, said Friday legislative leaders discussed the issue with Gov. Butch Otter at a meeting Thursday. He said senators wanted to see possible bill language for additional discussion.

“I would guess that we will see a (draft bill) before the end of the session, within the next couple weeks,” Hill said.

There are at least three other possible faith-healing bills circulating, but none has the conditional backing of leadership.

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