

Legislative Issues to Watch This Session

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Utah's 2015 legislative session began on January 26, and several issues that concern people with disabilities may be discussed.

According to Jeff Sheen, policy analyst at Utah State University's Center for Persons with Disabilities, the biggest issue will be the Healthy Utah plan proposed by Gov. Gary Herbert.

"The legislature has four alternatives to his plan," Sheen said. "There are now five plans to provide additional coverage to people who don't have insurance coverage in the state. This will take a lot of time and energy."

Rep. Ed Redd, (R) Dist. 4, which includes Cache Valley, is proposing an exciting pilot program for children with complex medical needs, Sheen said.

"For families with really complex issues, their out-of-pocket expense is so high, some families have had to turn custody of their child over to the state so the child will qualify for Medicaid," Sheen said. "This pilot would allow

the child to qualify for Medicaid as secondary coverage. Right now, the child can't get that if the parents have resources.

"This is really significant," Sheen continued. "We hope it gets the time and attention that it needs."

There is no bill number yet for that pilot.

Other legislative issues to watch include a state ABLE Act, based on the recently passed federal legislation that allows people with disabilities to save money for future care needs.

There is also a hearing aid pilot project that is hoped to move out of the pilot stage, and a push to increase the reimbursement rate for respite care providers, Sheen said.

Advocates and other interested parties should watch for Saturday morning Town Hall meetings with local legislators, Sheen said. Additional dates are planned, but have not been announced yet.

There is one upcoming opportunity to meet with legislators, however. The Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities reception in the Capitol Rotunda will be Thursday, Feb. 5 from 4:30 to 5:45 p.m.