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Local

Posted on Fri, Dec. 01, 2006

FSSA's rollover feared too hasty

Privatization timeline worries services group

By Ken Kusmer
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS – Some advocates raised concerns Thursday that the state could rush its proposed transition to private vendors handling food stamp, Medicaid and Welfare cases and leave vulnerable Hoosiers without the public benefits they need.

A timeline published with the state's proposed \$1.16 billion contract with IBM Corp. to take over some benefit-processing duties shows a pilot program covering 10 percent of the state lasting roughly three months before a phased rollout to other sections of the state.

Aides to Gov. Mitch Daniels have emphasized the rollout of the privatization must be "completely transitioned" from the Family and Social Services Administration in one area, no matter how long that takes, before expanding to another. However, some advocates said the timeline published and posted online Thursday renewed fears that the state might rush the changes and hurt some of the 1.1 million children and elderly, disabled and needy Hoosiers who rely on food stamps and other benefits.

"They're just trying to do it too fast," said Patti O'Callaghan of Lafayette, who is president of the Indiana Coalition for Human Services, an umbrella group of private agencies across the state that provide social services.

The timeline with the proposed contract – which still awaits approval from federal officials – calls for the pilot program to begin next Aug. 20 in about 10 counties surrounding Marion and to last about three months. It would expand to southern Indiana in November 2007, to northern Indiana in January 2008 and finally to central Indiana during March 2008.

FSSA spokesman Dennis Rosebrough said the timeline in the contract was tentative and represented targets for IBM and its coalition of partners. "We are not going to be held to some artificial timeline – bottom line," he said. "Progress on the timeline will be based on our successful implementation in one region before we move on to the next."

On Tuesday, a day before Gov. Mitch Daniels announced the IBM contract, O'Callaghan sent letters to him and to U.S. Department of Agriculture administrators requesting a pilot program lasting at least six months.



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