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Outsourcing plan hits key milestone

More than 1,500 state employees will join the private sector today.

By Ken Kusmer

of The Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The outsourcing of much of Indiana's welfare safety net reaches a key milestone today when more than 1,500 workers leave their state jobs to join a group of private vendors with a 10-year contract designed to streamline the way people receive benefits.

Those former employees of the Family and Social Services Administration still will help people apply for and continue receiving food stamps, Medicaid and other aid, but not as state caseworkers. They'll now be employees of Dallas-based Affiliated Computer Services Inc., a partner in the IBM Corp.-led group calling itself the Hoosier Coalition for Self Sufficiency.

At stake is the uninterrupted delivery of benefits depended upon by 1.1 million children, seniors, and needy and disabled people, one of every six Indiana residents. The administration of Gov. Mitch Daniels has wagered \$1.16 million on a successful outcome, one of the richest contracts in state history.

Not everyone shares the administration's confidence, especially after Texas abruptly canceled a similar contract March 12. The Food and Nutrition Service, the federal agency that oversees the food stamp program, imposed new demands on FSSA last week so it can better monitor the progress of the IBM coalition. Advocates also are watching closely to make sure the privatization doesn't leave gaping holes in the safety net for vulnerable Hoosiers.

"It really does behoove everyone in Indiana to look at this carefully as it unfolds," said Patti O'Callaghan of Lafayette, president of an advocate network called the Indiana Coalition for Human Services.

On the Web

For more information about the Indiana Family & Social Services Administration, go to www.in.gov/fssa.



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