

Indiana Lawmakers Push Legislation to Halt Modernization Efforts until Problems are Fixed

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Despite the Governor's disapproval, both Democrats and Republicans are taking measures to stop the administration's welfare modernization program from rolling over to the remaining counties in order to hold them accountable for the systematic problems with the new system.

Last week, state Representative Suzanne Crouch of Evansville introduced **House Bill 1691** to temporarily stop the expansion of Indiana's new **welfare eligibility** program to the 33 remaining counties it has not yet reached. So far, the privatization rollout has spread to 59 counties. **Governor Mitch Daniels**, who is displeased with the lawmaker of his own party, argued that such legislation would be a step backward from what his administration has worked so hard to achieve with new technology. In 2006, the Daniels administration outsourced the eligibility process for Medicaid, food stamps and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to a team of vendors led by IBM Corp and Affiliated Computer Services (ACS) through a 10-year, \$1.16 billion privatization contract. The modernization efforts aimed at computerizing paper records and allowing clients to enroll for benefits online or by phone through a toll-free call center, while reducing fraud and waste. Crouch, along with other legislators, criticized the transition to the new system as being poorly managed by the **Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA)**.

Legislators in the local rollout areas have been receiving complaints on a weekly basis from constituents, hospitals, and health care providers about the FSSA call center, web-application system, and even the remaining FSSA county offices. The high volume of complaints is a clear indication that the system needs to be fixed before it is further expanded. The list of complaints include lost paperwork or the new call center system losing critical documents; delays in enrolling patients; and issuing conflicting information. Other complaints range from eligible recipients being cut off from benefits to people experiencing long lines and long waits for assistance. Moreover, clients went from having individual case workers assigned to each person's case to multiple call center representatives. Additionally, the new system makes it difficult for people with disabilities and the elderly to navigate.

Although the House Bill 1691 would slow the management of the state's **1.1 million-client welfare caseload**, these systematic problems need to be addressed. According to Crouch, the bill is intended to hold the administration accountable for what they have embarked on. As per Daniels, who disagrees with Crouch, the customer-service problems can be fixed administratively rather than legislatively. Despite the glitches in the system, he intends to move forward with automating welfare intake in the additional counties and believes that overtime, the issues will resolve themselves. If the bill does pass, Daniels will have the option to veto.