

Public allowed to attend hearing on FSSA contract

By KEN KUSMER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

The state has changed the timetable for awarding a \$1 billion contract to outsource the application process for food stamps and other benefits to allow a public hearing five days before the deal is complete.

The Department of Administration made the change after The Associated Press reported last week that the Family and Social Services Administration planned to award the contract, its richest ever, without taking public comments until June 30, the day after signing the deal.

The public hearing is scheduled for June 30, still one day after the contract is "finalized." But it will

FSSA OVERHAUL

What's new: The state has published its formal Request For Proposal to private vendors interested in bidding on a \$1 billion plan to outsource the application process for food stamps and other welfare benefits.

What's changed: As required by state law on public-private partnerships, the Family and Social Services Administration will hold a public hearing on the deal on June 30, five days before it awards the contract.

What's next: Vendors' proposals are due to the state by March 15.

not be awarded until July 5, the second business day after the Fourth of July holiday weekend, according to the revised timetable published in the state's formal solicitation for proposals.

The Feb. 2 story, in which FSSA Secretary Mitch Roob cited state law in defending the timing of the public hearing, prompted the Department of Administration to re-examine state law on public-private agreements, Roob said Friday.

That led to the change included in the state's formal Request For Proposal to potential bidders published Thursday.

The proposed 10-year, \$1 billion outsourcing plan covers the application process for food stamps, Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and other federal benefits received by one in six Indiana residents. About 1 million Hoosiers, half of them children, receive benefits through the programs that FSSA currently manages itself.

State plans for possible bird-flu cases

By DEANNA MARTIN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INDIANAPOLIS

Indiana has formed statewide and county-level emergency plans to deal with a possible avian flu pandemic, plans that include worst-case measures such as quarantining people, canceling major public events or limiting treatment, state officials said Friday.

Gov. Mitch Daniels said the state needs to be prepared for the worst while hoping for the best.

"All steps that we can think of to take are being taken," Daniels said. "If, perish the thought, we should have to implement this plan, life would be very different in Indiana, at least for a while. It contains steps that most of us have not seen in our lifetimes."

The strain of flu called H5N1 is spreading through wild birds and poultry in numerous countries and has raised fears of a global epidemic if it mutates to become easily spread among humans.

Daniels said local officials have already done training exercises, and the state is planning a March 23 summit to further discuss the plan.

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