



10:02 p.m. UPDATE: Residents angry at welfare meeting

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— ANDERSON — Charles Baxter is running out of time.

The 51-year-old Anderson man says his liver is failing, and each day, he wakes wondering if it will be his last. Baxter, a U.S. Army veteran, says his life is at risk because of the privatization of Indiana's welfare system. "The doctor says I'm on borrowed time," he said Tuesday before a crowd of about 150 other locals experiencing problems with the changing system. "I applied for Medicaid last May and haven't heard a thing yet."

Baxter and others attended a meeting at the UAW Local 663 Union Hall in Anderson to discuss a growing opinion that the Family and Social Services Administration's recent modernization of the welfare system is hurting Hoosiers.

Representatives from United Senior Action of Indiana, Hoosiers First Inc., Madison County Triad, Indiana Alliance for Retired Americans and the Indiana Home Care Task Force organized the event after hearing complaints in recent months that Medicaid benefits, food stamps and state welfare aid had been cut off due to the change.

Several local political figures were represented at the meeting. Sen. Tim Lanane, D-Anderson, Rep. Scott Reske, D-Pendleton, and Rep. Dennis Tyler, D-Muncie, attended the forum, while Sen. Sue Errington, D-Muncie, and Rep. Terri Austin, D-Anderson, sent representatives in their place.

FSSA began a modernization pilot program in 12 counties, including Madison County, late last year. Since then, local social service agencies have been flooded with complaints. In March, FSSA expanded the program, outraging its critics.

FSSA's Mitch Roob maintains that the state has statistics to suggest that the program is helping more Hoosiers.

Judi Turpen of Anderson stood before the crowd and said her mother was recently at risk for being evicted from her assisted living facility because Medicaid would no longer pay the bill. Turpen says FSSA workers wanted to force her to take her mother into her own home, which is not wheelchair accessible. "I called Gov. Daniels' office and said my house isn't accessible, but I know yours is because I paid for it."

After threatening to move her elderly mother into the governor's mansion, Turpen said, FSSA workers finally resolved her problem.

Robert Guess of Anderson, who is disabled, says his benefits were dropped when the system switched over. "They started denying my medicine," Guess said. "It's just getting harder and harder to make ends meet. I'm living on \$500 a month. We don't want the government to have to subsidize us. It's wrong to deny anybody medicine that they have to have.

"It's going to kill people in the end," Guess said, sending the crowd into a roaring applause.

Residents approached the microphone one after one, explaining stories of lost paperwork, inconsistent answers, filing deadline issues and re-authorization chaos. Advocates claimed that those who had qualified for benefits for decades were suddenly being told that they did not qualify.

Christina Clark of Anderson suffers from lupus and fibromyalgia and says she had one motivation on Tuesday. "I'm running on pure adrenaline today because I'm so mad," she shouted. "I'm fed up. We need it done today, not tomorrow, today!"

Anderson mother Bobbi Brown explained that she and her son are both mentally challenged. She spoke softly into the microphone, fighting tears as she told her story. Her food stamp and Medicaid benefits were recently

canceled, and she now relies on Meals on Wheels to feed her family. "Sometimes I don't eat because I want my son to eat."

Sarah Cooper is one of many social workers and nursing home advocates who appeared before the crowd claiming that senior citizens were being dropped from the system. She described a case involving an elderly nursing home resident who was recently denied Medicaid benefits.

"He was denied due to timely filing," she said. "C'mon, you've got to be kidding me. They give you only 10 days."

Cooper says the new system requires beneficiaries to represent themselves or to appoint an authorized representative to handle their case.

"The call center will not talk to us. I can't be the authorized representative for 127 people. They won't allow us to help them."

Many in the system are being denied benefits after missing a deadline or failing to provide adequate paperwork, Cooper said. The denial of services is blamed on a failure to cooperate in determining eligibility on the part of the benefits recipient, she said. "Failure to cooperate? If we were more cooperative, we'd be working at the document center!"

People receiving benefits must undergo a re-determination of eligibility under the new system. This is causing many problems, according to Cooper. "We've got 50 re-determinations in my building right now. They're getting denied left and right. The state needs to take care of the elderly, and they are not."

Baxter said the state's failure to meet his needs had affected his patriotism. "I am not proud to be an American anymore. You're supposed to feel proud to be an American. The government is killing us Americans."

Baxter says he wants to ask the governor one question.

"I would just ask why, why should a man, woman or child have to suffer at a point in their life when we come from the land of the beautiful and the home of the brave. It's really not what it appears to be."

Guess did not agree. "This system may kill a lot of us here. It may kill me. But I'll die being a proud American."

With America giving millions in foreign aid each year, Baxter questions whether he should remain in Indiana. "If I would have gone to Africa, I probably would've gotten help from the United States. Maybe we need to go over there."

"There's a lot of denial going on. If the whole justification for going to the system was to do things more efficiently, then they need to do things more efficiently," Lanane said.

Baxter said he hopes government officials address the issue quickly, saying that he is running out of time.

"My eyes are getting yellow, and I'm falling apart. I would just like some help before help is no longer needed in my life. Please help me before it's too late."

Tyler said that Democrats tried to stop the FSSA modernization program but were unable to slow the charge of Republicans backing the change. "Many in the House and Senate fought this program every way we could."

"I hope, at the end of the day, that you're mad and frustrated at the people who deserve it," Tyler said.

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