

# Nev. food stamp program expects federal fine

By Riley Snyder, Associated Press

CARSON CITY — Nevada health department officials are expecting a financial penalty from the federal government over simmering issues with the state's food stamp program.

Welfare program administrator Steve Fisher told a legislative budget committee Wednesday he expects the penalty due to delays in processing food stamp applications and a high error rate.

States are required to hit certain benchmarks for accuracy and timeliness to receive food stamp grants. Nevada's error rate on food stamp applications hovers around 8 percent, which is nearly twice the national average, Fisher said.

An administrator with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service sent a letter to Nevada in September detailing the program's issues and threatening to withhold federal grant funding if the state Department of Health and Human Services didn't submit a corrective action plan.

Fisher said the health department is taking steps to fix the program's problems, including hiring more full-time workers and reworking the method used to estimate the number of cases.

Legislators expressed apprehension over the department's plans and asked for more information about future hiring.

"It does us no good to give you positions when you don't have people in place," Assemblywoman Marilyn Kirkpatrick, D-Las Vegas, told Fisher.

Fisher said he didn't know the amount of the penalty because

federal officials were still compiling data from the last fiscal year. The program was fined \$144,000 when it was sanctioned in 2010.

Food and Nutrition Service spokesman Michael Ladd said the federal agency will take action sometime between April and July, depending on when the food stamp information is fully processed.

Food stamp applications have increased significantly over the last decade, with more than 450,000 Nevada residents expected to be enrolled in the program by 2016.