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For The Good of Illinois v. Illinois Office of Comptroller

Lawsuit Filed to Compel Comptroller Judy Baar-Topinka to Comply with State Law and Make Available the State of Illinois Checkbook for Public Review.

“There is no more important function of the states’ top financial officer than to give a line-by-line accounting to the people of Illinois of how their money is spent. It shouldn’t take a lawsuit to expose all financial transactions to the public.”

Adam Andrzejewski, CEO, nonprofit For The Good of Illinois

How can taxpayers have confidence in any proposed state pension solution, if elected officials are hiding line-by-line spending?

Springfield, IL – Today *For The Good of Illinois* filed a lawsuit to gain access to the state’s most important financial data- the State of Illinois checkbook – which was refused to us under a FOIA request.

Andrzejewski stated, “We filed the lawsuit because the Comptroller is obligated to obey the Freedom of Information law and the Attorney General is obligated to enforce the law.”

Nine months ago, Comptroller Judy Baar-Topinka rejected our request for the states’ checkbook. For the past five months, Attorney General Lisa Madigan’s office has sat silent on the enforcement action.

The Comptrollers’ rejection asserted “review, redaction, and arrangement of all 2011 vendor payments would take multiple staff members, dedicated solely to this request, more than **three days to complete.**” Topinka concluded that fulfilling the request was an “undue burden.”

For The Good of Illinois then filed an appeal with the Public Access Counselor at the Attorney General’s Office. After a few perfunctory phone calls and emails, there’s been five months of silence.



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Adam Andrzejewski continued, *“If the Comptroller can succeed in denying access to public information with such a feeble reason, then there really isn’t a ‘Freedom of Information Act’ in Illinois.”*

The Office of Comptroller has 305 employees and a total payroll of \$14.5 million (2011). Three employees working for three days, fulfilling our FOIA request would total approximately \$1,500. That’s 1/10,000th of the payroll- certainly not an undue financial or work burden.

Adam Andrzejewski CEO stated, *“We’re not asking Comptroller Topinka to lead the charge for openness and accountability- we’re asking her to follow the law and to follow nearly every other major unit of government in reasonably releasing this important data.”*

No other unit of government has rejected our request for their checkbook:

- **City of Chicago** provided 6.8 million checks for \$74 billion spent since 2001;
- **All Illinois Colleges & Universities**, provided 6.8 million checks for \$69 billion since 2004;
- **944 Illinois school districts** provided records for \$52 billion since 2006.

The Comptroller’s “Ledger” website illustrates why we need line-by-line data. Containing summaries of vendor spending and aggregate budget data, the individual transactions and details are hidden from taxpayers. The site hides the facts of exactly how the state spends money and therefore begs the question, “What are they hiding?”

Example: Nineteen times in eighteen months, Attorney General Lisa Madigan has approved reimbursement to an employee to travel from her home in Michigan to her mother’s home in Chicago. It’s 506 miles roundtrip. Thousands of taxpayer dollars have been spent. An in-state travel reimbursement account funds the travel, but the employee lives two states away.

Our goal at For the Good of Illinois is to post online at www.openthebooks.com “Every Dime” taxed and spent by all 7,000 units of Illinois government.

It shouldn’t take a lawsuit to force open the State of Illinois checkbook.

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For The Good of Illinois was founded in 2007 by Adam Andrzejewski. In 2011, at our transparency portal www.openthebooks.com, we posted the salaries and pension of virtually all 1 million public employees at every level of Illinois government. In 2012, we started adding the checkbooks; therefore, the portal will soon contain every dime taxed and spent at all 7,000 units of Illinois government. Our mission is to engage, educate and empower citizens to demand a transparent, accountable and limited government.