

News

Some Illinois Lottery players cross state lines for tickets because of IOUs

By **Angie Leventis Lourgos** · Contact Reporter

Chicago Tribune

SHARE THIS



Lottery IOUs push some Illinois players to buy their tickets in other states

OCTOBER 16, 2015, 2:20 PM

Randall Lobello of Bensenville said he still plans to buy lottery tickets, despite the Illinois Lottery's announcement Wednesday that even more winners will be getting IOUs.

He'll just play in another state, one where winnings would be paid out immediately.

"I do a lot of traveling; I would just jump to the border and go to Wisconsin," said Lobello, 47. "I used to buy lottery tickets in Illinois, but I'm not purchasing them anymore. If they're not paying when they say they're going to pay, I have no confidence in the future."

As of Thursday, Illinois Lottery payments for any winnings over \$600 are being delayed until the state budget stalemate is resolved. Lottery officials said the agency's check-writing account is depleted and no authority can replenish it, though winnings under \$600 can still be retrieved immediately at retail kiosks.

Article continues below ↓

The Illinois Lottery began delaying payments in July, at first only for prizes larger than \$25,000 due to state law barring larger payouts because the legislature must authorize the state comptroller to release the funds.

Two winners sued the Illinois Lottery in federal court last month, alleging fraud.

Their attorney, Thomas Zimmerman Jr. of Zimmerman Law Offices, said he plans to file an amended complaint later this month, adding at least 20 other lottery winners whose payments have also been delayed. He expects more winners will join the class-action suit now that the lottery has lowered the amount for immediate payouts.

"The state is violating the lottery law by using the money to pay the lottery's operating costs and ongoing administrative expenses ... without first paying winnings," Zimmerman said. "Is the lottery director not earning a paycheck? And all of the employees who run the lottery, how are they getting paid?"

The lawsuit also named the lottery's acting director, B.R. Lane, the lottery's private management company Northstar Lottery Group and the Illinois Lottery Control Board. An Illinois Lottery spokesman said he could not comment on pending legal action.

Joe Joost, 62, a truck driver from Chicago's Belmont Cragin neighborhood, said he's joining the lawsuit. He was in a pool of 25 Illinois Lottery players who won \$1 million in early September, with \$28,500 in winnings for him after taxes, but the state hasn't released the prize yet.

Joost said he and his pool intend to keep playing the lottery, but they won't buy another ticket in Illinois. They're going to cross state lines.

"We have one gentleman who goes to Michigan about once a week," he said. "If he's going up to Michigan, we'll play in Michigan. We have another gentleman who goes to Indiana a lot."

A worker at Red Roof Liquor & Lottery in Columbia, Ill., near the Missouri state line, said about 80 percent of his clientele typically come from Missouri. With gas and cigarettes cheaper in Missouri, the Illinois Lottery used to be the biggest draw for patrons, but he said that's no longer the case.

"For the last two months we've seen a decrease, since September," said the worker, who did not want to be named. "People are saying the state won't pay them."

Casimir Soczyk, who works at Santori's Liquors in south suburban Lansing, said ever since lottery payments were delayed, customers keep talking about going to nearby Indiana to buy tickets.

"I've had people say 'I'm done with this,' but I've seen them come back," he said. "More people are bringing it up."

Tom Remsen, 33, of Rockford, said he buys lottery tickets about four times a year when there's a big jackpot. He said he'll continue to play in Illinois despite the payment delay, because it would still be worth it to win big even if he has to wait for payment.

"I'd just hope like heck that it would come," he said.

But he does wonder how Illinois officials would respond if the situation were reversed.

"How would the state react if we told them we don't have the money to pay taxes," he said, "but when it becomes available, we'll be sure to give it to you?"

eleventis@tribpub.com

Twitter @angie_leventis