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Illinois Lottery Can't Pay Off Big Winners But It Is Still Selling Tickets

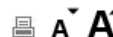
by Rod Kackley

Beyond the allegation of fraud, the problem is both legislative and bureaucratic.

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Win more than \$25,000 in the Illinois Lottery and the best you'll get is the same thing you'll get from your out-of-work brother-in-law sleeping on your couch, drinking all your beer — an IOU.

That is not good enough for two lottery winners. They've filed a federal lawsuit against the Illinois Lottery, which is continuing to sell tickets, even though it doesn't have the authority to pay off anyone who wins more than \$25,000.

Rhonda Rasche is waiting to collect the \$50,000 she won on a \$3 scratch-off ticket.

"I feel like my balloon was kind of deflated," Rasche told reporters at a press conference. "I wasn't totally banking on the money but it was pretty crushing. I just feel like it's totally unfair."

"If I was the one selling raffle tickets and I didn't pay, I would be sued or in jail or both."

The lawsuit filed by attorney Thomas Zimmerman, Jr. on behalf of Rasche and co-plaintiff Danny Chasten — who is due \$250,000 from a winning ticket in July — alleges Illinois Lottery officials are committing fraud by continuing to advertise and sell games even though they know they can't pay off winners of more than \$25,000.

The suit seeks to force the payment of people who win more than \$25,000 with 5 percent interest. It also asks that nobody who works for the Illinois Lottery, or the private company that manages it, get a dime in pay until the winners get what's owed them.

Beyond the allegation of fraud — advertising what the Illinois Lottery can deliver — the problem is both legislative and bureaucratic.

The state of Illinois is three months into its fiscal year, but Gov. Bruce Rauner (R) and the Democrat-controlled Legislature have been unable to agree on a new budget. They are stuck on how to fill a \$2.6 billion deficit that opened up when some temporary tax increases expired.

Under Illinois law, the state comptroller has to sign checks of more than \$25,000. Without a budget, the comptroller has no authority to sign those checks, so the Illinois Lottery doesn't have the ability to pay off winners.

"The lottery is a state agency like many others, and we're obviously affected by the budget situation," Illinois Lottery spokesman Steve Rossi told the *Chicago Tribune*. "Since the legal authority is not there for the comptroller to disburse payments, those payments are delayed."

People waiting for their checks are not satisfied with that answer.

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