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U.S.

Illinois Lottery Winners Sue for Their Jackpots Amid Budget Impasse

State not making large payouts since there is no official budget

By **BEN KESLING** And **JOE BARRETT**

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CHICAGO—Two lottery winners sued the Illinois Lottery on Wednesday after the organization stopped paying out large awards due to the cash-strapped state's budget impasse.

Rhonda Rasche and Daniel Chasteen filed a lawsuit in federal court against the lottery, its director and the private contractor that runs the state's Lotto system. Mr. Chasteen won \$250,000 with a Cool Cash Scratch-Off ticket while Ms. Rasche won \$50,000 playing a Crossword Scratch-Off, both of which offer, according to the lottery's website, "instant possibilities."

But neither plaintiff has received any money.



Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner waved to supporters during a rally last month. He's locked in a budget battle with the legislature, and some lottery winners say that leaves them on the losing end. *PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS*

The state's lottery has said it does not have the authority to make payouts larger than \$25,000 after the state started a new fiscal year July 1 without a budget.

Democratic legislative leaders and GOP Gov. Bruce Rauner are deadlocked about how to fill a projected \$5 billion shortfall.

The lawsuit seeks to have the lottery suspend sales of tickets that might have winnings of more than \$25,000, pay all big-ticket winners immediately with interest, and suspend the operating expenses of the lottery. It also seek class-action status on behalf of the dozens of people it claims are also awaiting payments.

A lottery spokeswoman said the organization cannot comment on pending litigation but emphasized that “the issue is having legislative authority to pay these winning claims, not a budget shortfall issue.” In other words, the lottery has the money, it just isn’t allowed to make the payments.

Mr. Chasteen, a 56-year-old foreman at a stamping plant, bought a scratch-off ticket on July 20 at a gas station in Spring Valley, Ill., where he stops every day on his way to work. He hit it big with a \$250,000 payout, but he learned two weeks ago that he wouldn’t get paid until the state resolves its budget mess.

“You dream about winning the lottery all your life and it finally happened, and you don’t get paid,” he said.

He said he plans to pay off all his bills with the lottery winnings, so the next time he gets a paycheck he can say, “I didn’t go to work to pay the bills. I went to work and this money is mine.”

Mr. Rauner’s office declined to comment on the current Lotto lawsuit or the inability of winners to get payouts. B.R. Lane, the acting director of the lottery who was also named in the suit, declined to comment on the matter through her office.

Northstar Lottery Group, which manages the lottery and is cited in the suit, did not respond to multiple requests for comment.