



Sarah Kenney <skenney@barringtonhills-il.gov>

VBH BOT ePacket Legal FYI

1 message

Robert Kosin <rkosin@barringtonhills-il.gov>

Fri, Nov 18, 2011 at 7:41 AM

To: Dolores Trandel <clerk@barringtonhills-il.gov>

Cc: Sarah Kenney <skenney@barringtonhills-il.gov>

Transparency portal no longer has state workers' 2008-09 pay

By KEVIN P. CRAVER - kcraver@shawmedia.com

NW Herald

November 17, 2011

Visitors to the Illinois Transparency and Accountability Portal website can look up state expenditures dating to 2008.

But if the expenditure you're curious about is a state employee's salary, you can look them up only through last year.

The local state representative behind the portal, Mike Tryon, R-Crystal Lake, said he intends to fix the shortcoming, which was revealed in a Wednesday report by the Illinois Policy Institute, a conservative think tank.

Illinois has been removing information about how much state employees were paid in past years while past departmental spending has remained online, according to the policy institute's report, "Now You See It, Now You Don't." Salary histories used to go back to 2008, policy institute Executive Vice President Kristina Rasmussen said.

Rasmussen, who co-wrote the report, said the omissions struck the institute as odd, given that accountability sites of other states include salaries in past years.

"We thought it was strange that the state was erring on the side of less information rather than more," Rasmussen said.

Tryon said his intent behind the accountability portal, which is run by state Central Management Services, always was to create a historical record. He said he likes to think that the lack of historical employee data is not intentional, but a misreading of the law, given the Illinois political hot potato of public employee salaries, benefits and pensions.

"If you don't have the historical data, you're taking out one of the best parts of being able to use the transparency portal," Tryon said. "I'm hoping it's a misunderstanding by CMS of what the portal is supposed to do. It was pretty clear in debate to provide a historical database of all state expenditures."

Tryon said he first intends to ask CMS and Gov. Pat Quinn to have the deficiency fixed. If that does not succeed, he will file a bill when the General Assembly reconvenes in January for the spring session.

State employee salaries are public information under the Illinois Freedom of Information Act. Rasmussen said that keeping up past salary data would be in state government's best interest rather than spending time processing FOIA requests.

Improvements made to FOIA in 2010 require governments to respond within five calendar days and log each individual information request.

"Why go through the stress of making people fill out FOIA forms and use up valuable state employee time?" Rasmussen said.

A bill by state Rep. Jack Franks, D-Marengo, to add county, township and municipal salaries to the database passed the House last March on an 112-2 vote, but has languished in the Senate Assignments Committee since July.

The bill, House Bill 222, is opposed by the lobbying groups Metro Counties of Illinois, to which McHenry County government belongs, and Township Officials of Illinois. Metro Counties opposes three bills this session that strengthen Illinois open-government laws, and supports at least six aimed at weakening them, according to McHenry County legislative reports.

About this series

"No More Excuses" is an ongoing Northwest Herald series about the public's right to know in Illinois.

On the Net

- The state Transparency and Accountability Portal is available online at www.accountability.illinois.gov.
- To can read the Illinois Policy Institute report, "Now You See It, Now You Don't," visit <http://shawurl.com/4gb>.

To read House Bill 222, which would add county, township and municipal salaries to the database, visit <http://shawurl.com/4gc>.

###
