



OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER  
STATE OF ILLINOIS

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

Friday, August 18, 2017

**CONTACT:**

Jamey.Dunn@illinoiscomptroller.gov

217-670-9134

Abdon.Pallasch@illinoiscomptroller.gov

312-835-3317

**COMPTROLLER MENDOZA CALLS ON LAWMAKERS TO  
OVERRIDE THE GOVERNOR'S VETO OF THE DEBT  
TRANSPARENCY ACT**

SPRINGFIELD — Comptroller Susana Mendoza is calling on the General Assembly to immediately override Governor Bruce Rauner's veto of the Debt Transparency Act (House Bill 3649), legislation supported by members from both political parties aimed at arming the legislature and taxpayers with more information about the state's finances.

"Don't Illinois taxpayers deserve to know how much debt the state has run up in their names?" Comptroller Mendoza asked.

The state's unpaid bill backlog more than tripled in the past two years since Governor Rauner was elected, reaching a record high point of more than \$15 billion. This exploding debt makes it all the more urgent that policymakers and their constituents receive timely reporting of outstanding bills and the growing interest costs to taxpayers.

The Debt Transparency Act, an initiative of Comptroller Mendoza sponsored by Rep. Fred Crespo, D-Hoffman Estates and Sen. Andy Manar, D-Bunker Hill, would require state agencies to disclose monthly to the Comptroller the bills they are holding and estimate the amount of late payment interest penalties that will be paid on those liabilities.

Agencies already have the personnel and infrastructure in place to compile the data, but the information is outdated by the time it is received. Current state law only requires agencies to report on Oct. 1 of each year, the aggregate amount of bills being held on the previous June 30.

In his veto message, the Governor lamented that his staff should not have to work harder to get the numbers out monthly instead of annually. But the truth is, Governor Rauner's efforts to hold back true numbers from the public cost taxpayers far more than any additional work his staff would have to perform to let the public know the extent of the state's debt – at least \$800 million in late payment interest penalties so far.



## OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER STATE OF ILLINOIS

“If Rauner does whip out his veto pen, expect words like ‘onerous’ in the message,” the Quad City Times wrote before Governor Rauner vetoed the bill. “It would be a bunk excuse, a dodge that neglects the bill’s obvious links to good budgeting, in either the public or private sector. Those who originally supported the Debt Transparency Act ... must stick by their positions and stand up to pressure from the governor’s office.”

“Rather than accuse responsible elected officials of trying to ‘micromanage’ state agencies, the Governor should start managing his agencies’ budgets and honestly disclosing their debts,” Comptroller Mendoza said.

“The level of uncertainty about the amount of debt was made clear recently when the known backlog jumped by \$1 billion in a single week as bills for state health insurance, medical services, corrections, human services and more were reported by the Office of Management and Budget,” *The Quincy Herald-Whig* Editorial Page wrote. “No successful business could be expected to run on such skimpy and outdated financial data, and no government should operate that way, either.”

“The bill holds agencies accountable by requiring they report outstanding bills and interest estimates each month, and it increases transparency for taxpayers because it allows them to find out how much interest they will pay on overdue bills and how long it will take to pay off the penalties,” wrote the

*Moline Dispatch/Rock Island Argus* editorial board in support of HB 3649. “Even in hopelessly divided Springfield, issues of transparency and accountability should transcend politics.”

The legislation was also supported by the Better Government Association and made the group’s list of “15 good government reforms” approved in the spring legislative session.

The Comptroller’s office estimates that Illinois owes at least \$800 million in penalties on its overdue bills. “That’s \$800 million of taxpayer money we are just throwing away – it’s not helping kids get day care or go to college. It’s not helping seniors get Meals on Wheels or keep their home health care. It’s money that will never be invested in creating a single job in Illinois” Mendoza said. “I’m disappointed that Governor Rauner vetoed this common sense transparency initiative. Policymakers need this up-to-date fiscal information when making budgeting decisions, and there is no good reason to deny it to them.”

*The Quad-City Times* editorial board called the Debt Transparency Act “a good piece of legislation that’s in line with the private sector’s best practices.”

###