

Judge asked to block outside money for Illinois Lottery

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CHICAGO (AP) — An attorney representing Illinois Lottery winners who haven't been paid their winnings has asked a federal judge to prevent 38 other state lotteries from sending money to the agency.

The winners represented by attorney Thomas Zimmerman Jr. in a lawsuit haven't been paid because of Illinois' lack of a budget. Zimmerman filed a motion for a temporary restraining order late Tuesday asking the judge to bar the other lotteries and the association overseeing Mega Millions and Powerball from giving the Illinois Lottery the money owed to Illinois winners of those games.

Zimmerman asked that the money instead be held in an interest-bearing, court-controlled account.

"If someone in Illinois wins (Powerball or Mega Millions), then other states that participate in the game have to kick in some of the prize money," Zimmerman said. "Illinois is then holding the money and not paying the winner. All we're asking is don't send it (the money) to Illinois —

send it to the court ... so we can get these people paid or earn interest on the money until it can be paid."

A court hearing was scheduled Thursday, the Chicago Tribune reports.

An Illinois Lottery spokesman declined to comment, saying it doesn't discuss pending litigation.

Data obtained by The Associated Press show Illinois Lottery ticket sales have plummeted since officials announced in mid-October it was delaying payments topping \$600 because of the budget impasse. That followed a late August that the lottery would be delaying payment of prizes above \$25,000.

A pair of lottery winners sued in federal court in September, accusing the Illinois Lottery of committing fraud by selling tickets without the state comptroller having authority to make out checks because of the lack of a budget. The number of plaintiffs has since grown to 21.

The lawsuit seeks to have the Illinois Lottery pay withheld prizes plus 5 percent interest, as well as have the lottery be barred from selling tickets for games for which it can't pay out winnings.