

Illinois Lottery winners file federal lawsuit over halted payments because no state budget

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CHICAGO — Two lottery winners filed a federal lawsuit against the Illinois Lottery on Wednesday for stopping payouts of prizes because the Legislature and governor have failed to agree on a state budget.

The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court by Rhonda Rasche, who is awaiting a \$50,000 payout, and Danny Chasteen, who won \$250,000, seeks class-action status and the halt of ticket sales.

Last month, the Illinois comptroller's office said that without a budget for the July 1 fiscal year, there wasn't authority to write checks over \$25,000 and payments would be delayed.

"How the heck can they do this, and they're still selling tickets?" said Rasche, a resident of the Chicago suburb of Homer Glen who won her money in July from a \$3 scratch-off ticket. "If I was the one selling raffle tickets and I didn't pay, I would be sued or in jail or both."

Rasche became emotional as she told of her plans to spend some of her winnings on home improvements, new furniture and a vacation for her best friend and the friend's sister who had nursed their mother during a terminal illness.

The lawsuit names Lottery Director B.R. Lane, the Illinois Lottery Control Board and Northstar Lottery Group as defendants. It seeks to force the lottery to pay winners of more than \$25,000 with 5 percent interest and asks that the lottery be barred from paying its administrative or operational costs until the winners receive their prizes. The lawsuit alleges dozens await more than \$288 million in prizes.

"The lottery represents that you can win instantly," said Rasche's attorney, Thomas Zimmerman Jr. "They fail to tell you as of July 1 they're not going to pay. But yet they continue to sell the tickets under those false pretenses."

Comptroller Leslie Munger says winnings can't be paid without a budget unlike other expenses dictated by court orders.

not yet received a copy.

State Rep. Jack Franks, D-Marengo, said he would soon file legislation to allow the state comptroller to cut checks to prize winners despite the ongoing budget fight.

"They've got the money; they just don't have the legal authority to spend it," Franks said. "My bill will allow them legal authority to do it."

Zimmerman said several other lottery winners have contacted attorneys in his office seeking to join the lawsuit and he expects to add them.