

Lottery Winners Shouldn't Be Anonymous - NJ OPRA Blog

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A new bill pending in the Senate, S-2267, directs the State Lottery Commission to amend its regulations so that the identities of lottery winners are not accessible under the Open Public Records Act (OPRA). The bill offers the winners of the lottery lifetime anonymity.

In 2013, former Governor Christie vetoed a similar bill that would have allowed lottery winners to remain anonymous for one year because he claimed it “could undermine the transparency that provides taxpayers confidence in the integrity of the Lottery and its games.” Similar bills have recently failed in other states, with Governor Cuomo recently vetoing such a bill in New York.

S-2267 raises major concerns. While Governor Christie's track record on transparency was notoriously pretty bad, on this issue he was right.

Without disclosure of the name of the winner(s), what protections are in place to combat corruption?

What will prevent lottery insiders from rigging the game? (It has happened!)

What will prevent the person who purchased tickets for the office pool from collecting the cash anonymously and quietly resigning without telling co-workers that the office pool tickets won? (Similar things have happened!)

What will give lottery ticket purchasers confidence that the money was really distributed to a legitimate winner and that the Commission didn't just make up a fake winner and pocket all the profits?

It's true that “lottery fame” can be a hassle and that many winners describe winning as both the best and worst thing to happen to them. But, transparency is important. It guards against corruption and

reassures lottery ticket purchasers that the money was properly awarded to a legitimate winner in a fair game.

Those who do not want the fame that comes from winning millions and millions of dollars should opt out of playing the game. The risks of legislating anonymity for lottery winners are real and we need to have to assurances that these games are legitimate. S-2267 should not be passed. Rather, when someone buys a lottery ticket, they do so with the understanding that the public has a right to know who the lucky winner is.