



February 24, 2009

**An Open Letter to the New Jersey Legislature:
Taxpayers Support Online Spending Transparency (SB 445)**

Dear Legislator:

On behalf of the more than 10,000 New Jersey members of the National Taxpayers Union (NTU), I urge you to bring greater accountability to New Jersey by passing SB 445, the Transparency in Government Act. This legislation would create a comprehensive searchable Internet database of state fiscal operations, shining light on New Jersey's budgetary process for the taxpayers who foot the bill.

Last month in his State of the State address, Governor Corzine expressed a commitment to expanded transparency and accountability in state government. Sens. Joseph Pennacchio and Leonard Lance have taken the next step down that road with the introduction of SB 445. The legislation would create a database of state agency expenditures, bond debt service, public employee salaries and wages, state contracts, capital improvements, state revenues, and bonded indebtedness. The site's searchability is key, as it allows everyday citizens to easily navigate different agencies and their often confusing budget documents. With New Jersey taxpayers working until May 7th just to pay off their tax bills for the year, allowing them to easily access information on where that money goes should be common courtesy as well as common sense.

Many states have already launched similar transparency Web sites, including Texas, Nebraska, Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma. These states provided this service to their citizens for a very low cost, with some using pre-existing funds. In Texas, Comptroller Susan Combs' office identified \$8.6 million in cost savings as a direct result of the implementation of Open Book Texas. The pro-transparency movement has flourished at the state level since the 2006 passage of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act. This legislation, co-sponsored by Sen. Tom Coburn (R-OK) and then-Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL), created USA Spending.gov, which millions of Americans now use to track how their federal tax dollars are spent.

The same transparency needs to be instituted at the state level in New Jersey. Taxes continue to rise without citizens' knowledge of their final destination. New Jersey has the highest state and local tax burden in the country. Now more than ever it is vital to hold government accountable to the taxpayers who fund it, and identify serious redundancies, inefficiencies, and cost savings. It's time for the Legislature to pass SB 445, the Transparency in Government Act.

Sincerely,

Joshua Culling
State Government Affairs Manager
National Taxpayers Union