

For Immediate Release  
Wednesday, March 25th, 2015 at 10:30 am EST  
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### **NEW REPORT: Connecticut Receives "A" in Annual Report on Transparency of Government Spending**

Connecticut received an "A" when it comes to government spending transparency, according to "Following the Money 2015: How the 50 States Rate in Providing Online Access to Government Spending Data," the sixth annual report of its *kind* by the Connecticut Public Interest Research Group Education Fund. Connecticut's grade improved since last year, jumping from a B to this year's A.

This year's report recognized more states as leaders than ever before, with all but two states allowing users to search the online checkbook by agency, keyword or vendor, or some combination of the three. Likewise, 44 states now provide checkbook-level data for one or more economic development subsidy programs.

"This year, most states have made their budgets more open to the public, allowing users to better scrutinize how the government uses their tax dollars," said Evan Preston, State Director with ConnPIRG. "Connecticut's budget transparency efforts are a national success story."

Officials from Connecticut and 46 other states provided the researchers with feedback on their initial evaluation of state transparency websites.

Based on an inventory of the content and ease-of-use of states' transparency websites, the "Following the Money 2015" report assigns each state a grade of "A" to "F." The leading states with the most comprehensive transparency websites are Ohio, Indiana, Wisconsin, Oregon, Louisiana, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Florida, Iowa, Illinois, Montana, New York, Texas, and South Dakota.

Connecticut is identified in the report as a "leading" state, and one of the country's most improved states overall. The state added checkbook-level spending data for many quasi-public agencies, and added some comprehensive data about its five largest economic development subsidies. The study identified Connecticut as one of the ten best states for online spending transparency and as one of the ten most improved states this year. The state could still improve further by more thoroughly including information about which spending data is excluded from the checkbook.

States that have created or improved their online transparency have typically done so with little upfront cost. In fact, top-flight transparency websites can save money for taxpayers, while also restoring public confidence in government and preventing misspending and pay-to-play contracts. Connecticut's transparency site was launched and is maintained annually from the existing budget of the Office of Fiscal Analysis.

State Comptroller Kevin Lembo of Connecticut said, "We are excited that Connecticut has gained ground nationally on transparency - but recognize that open government is always a work in progress, with no finish line. Our goal was to give Connecticut's transparency site, Open Connecticut, an extreme makeover, to deliver state financial data to the public more accurately and quickly than before. Our site now allows users to access online real-time revenue and expenditure details. Government operates

better when we allow academics, researchers, policymakers, journalists and the general public to view accurate real-time state financial information - but also export data of their choice in a user-friendly format."

"If government is to be truly beholden to the people, then spending transparency is a must. Voters should be able to easily access how money is spent. It is the only way citizen watchdogs can really hold government accountable. Connecticut has made tremendous strides towards open and transparent government spending and I applaud this 'A' rating and Comptroller Lembo's leadership on this important issue," said State Representative Matthew Lesser (D-Middletown).

State spending transparency appears to be a non-partisan issue. The report compared transparency scores with a variety of measures of state legislative, gubernatorial or public opinion partisanship and found that neither Republican nor Democratic states tended to have higher levels of spending disclosure.

The state of Ohio topped the rankings, climbing from a "D-" in 2014 to an "A+" this year for its improvements to the [Online Checkbook](#) transparency portal. Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel said, "I'm proud to have built OhioCheckbook.com and taken Ohio's transparency ranking from 46th to 1st in the nation. The work U.S. PIRG's doing on open government is helping set off a national race for transparency. My office was motivated to participate in this race and we will continue to work with U.S. PIRG and others to empower taxpayers to hold public officials accountable. "

Connecticut's transparency website is operated by the Connecticut General Assembly's Office of Fiscal Analysis. To visit it, click here: <http://www.osc.ct.gov/openct>

To read the full report: <http://uspirg.org/reports/usp/following-money-2015>