

Executive inspector general backs disclosure

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STATE CAPITOL BUREAU

*Published Thursday, February 15, 2007*

Illinois Executive Inspector General James Wright endorsed a legislative proposal Tuesday that would allow his office to make public the results of investigations into malfeasance by state officials and employees.

The executive inspector general's office, the ethics watchdog for agencies under Gov. Rod Blagojevich's control, currently is prohibited by law from releasing such reports.

That restriction, Wright said in a statement, "obscures the work of this office and contributes to public skepticism over the integrity of our investigations."

Wright said he backed legislation by state Sen. Bill Brady, R-Bloomington, that would allow his office to disclose reports through the Freedom of Information Act.

Names and personal information would be removed from any reports that are made public, under Brady's bill, SB151.

Brady said the secrecy restrictions were set up in order to shield state workers under investigation from the public and the media, who judge those investigated "guilty until proven innocent."

But Brady added that he was "frustrated" with the restrictions because "it seems like we're concealing information."

Making such information public, he said, "will purify the system."

The Blagojevich administration, currently the target of several federal corruption probes, has refused to release subpoenas concerning state hiring practices.

The executive inspector general's office received almost 1,300 complaints of wrongdoing by state workers in the last fiscal year, according to the office's annual report, which also was released Tuesday.

Of those complaints, 424 were investigated and 64 were found to be substantiated, the report said. But although the report also breaks down the complaints by type of allegation, agency and even county, no specifics were given.

The report indicates that at least 13 state employees were fired, resigned, or are in the process of being let go for wrongdoing found by the executive

inspector general during the last fiscal year.

Six investigations were turned over to the U.S. attorney's office, the report stated.

But the report does not indicate who the offenders were, what they did, or where they worked.

However, last May the Blagojevich administration announced that two workers at the Department of Central Management Services were fired for allegedly giving preferential treatment to politically connected job seekers. The employees, Dawn DeFraties and Michael Casey, were dismissed after an executive inspector general report found alleged wrongdoing on their part.

The two are now suing to get their jobs back.

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