

Disclosure laws in La. too weak

State laws requiring lawmakers to report income received from state and local agencies are among the weakest in the nation, according to a report by the Center for Public Integrity.

The watchdog group's latest report, released in September of last year, gives Louisiana a score of 43 out of 100. Only seven states were found to have looser reporting requirements than Louisiana. Three of those states — Vermont, Michigan and Idaho — have no disclosure laws at all.

Louisiana has laws, but they are not strict enough. Voters should be entitled to know how much money our lawmakers are receiving from local and state government agencies, as well as how that money was received.

"Compared to other states, we have near the lowest amount of information available," said Jim Brandt, president of the Public Affairs Research Council in a July 7 Town Talk article.

Currently, lawmakers are required to report all income exceeding \$250 received by them, their spouses or any business relationships that have received payments from government or gambling entities.

Lawmakers are only required to list the entity paying the money, amount of

money received, type of contact and whether the payment was made to the lawmaker, a spouse or company.

Lawmakers are not required to report income from businesses in which they or a spouse own 10 percent or less, their position in each company or the type of business conducted. Lawmakers whose businesses, such as nursing homes, receive Medicaid funding, are not required to report those funds as income.

Gov. Kathleen Blanco is required to report all sources of income. She has tried for the past two years to have a bill requiring all lawmakers to report all income sources passed by the legislature, but failed each time.

All lawmakers should be held to the same standard as the governor. Voters in the state have a right to know where every penny lawmakers receive from the government is coming from, particularly when they are allowed to vote themselves pay raises.

The Center for Public Integrity did give the state high scores for enforcement of disclosure laws. That sounds good, but until lawmakers are required to report more information about the money they are receiving, us voters will still be left in the dark.