

Friday, November 9, 2012

CONTACT: Wade Gibson, Senior Policy Fellow, (203) 498-4240, x113,
wgibson@ctvoices.org

Report: Connecticut Scores Well on Transparency of State Budget Process, But Has Room for Improvement

Scorecard on CT Budget Calls for Greater Disclosure

Connecticut's state government scores well on the transparency and openness of its budget process, but has room for improvement, according to a new report from the Fiscal Policy Center at Connecticut Voices for Children. The recently-launched Fiscal Policy Center provides research, analysis, and recommendations on state and federal budget and tax policies.

The report uses a state budget transparency scorecard developed by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a national think tank that conducts research on a range of government policies and programs. Based on national and international best practices, the scorecard provides a standard against which state budget practices can be measured.

Connecticut scores well, earning 74 points on a 100-point scale in which 75 points qualifies for the highest rating category. The state has also made progress over the past two decades. Twenty years ago, the state's budget process scored 56%. While the state scored well overall, the report indicated that policymakers have room for improvement, particularly when it comes to opportunities for public input and the level of detail reported in budget documents.

"The first step toward accountability is disclosure," said Wade Gibson, author of the report and Senior Policy Fellow at the Fiscal Policy Center. "While Connecticut follows many best practices in its state budget process, more openness could improve public understanding and ultimately produce a better budget."

In addition to the overall measure, the report assigned scores in several categories. Connecticut scores relatively well on:

- Providing information to put programs in context (88%). The state makes budget documents readily available to the public and includes descriptive language to explain budget changes.
- Providing updated estimates during the budget process that include long-term revenue and spending projections (100%).

-- MORE --

The state does not score as well on:

- Providing detailed spending and revenue estimates (73%). The state does not report on how federal funds are spent at a detailed program level.
- Publishing detailed information on taxes (56%). The state does not report on the relative impact of taxes on different income groups and business of different sizes. It also does not disclose a list of “revenue intercepts,” which are revenues earmarked for purposes that are outside the usual budget process.
- The openness of the budget process (39%). In particular, the administrative branch in Connecticut does not have a practice of holding hearings or soliciting public input prior to the release of the Governor’s proposed budget.

To improve accountability and transparency, the Fiscal Policy Center recommends that state policymakers enact several reforms such as:

- Reporting on how much people at different income levels and businesses of different sizes pay in state and local taxes.
- Disclosing a list of revenues that are diverted for special purposes outside of the usual budget.
- Publishing the Governor’s budget in Excel format, so that residents, media, and advocates can more easily analyze proposed changes.

“By taking some practical and simple steps, Connecticut can make its state budget more understandable and accountable,” said Sharon Langer, Interim Executive Director at Connecticut Voices for Children.

The report, “A Budget for All Connecticut? Evaluating the Transparency of the State Budget Process,” is available on the Connecticut Voices for Children website at www.ctvoices.org.

-END-