Texas Advancing Its Own Checkbook Transparency Legislation

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It appears that local government transparency measures are catching on across the country! The latest example comes from Texas. The Houston Chronicle has the details:

Governments would no longer be able to keep secret the amount of taxpayer funds spent on concerts, parades and other entertainment events if a bill advancing in the Texas House is passed into law.

House Bill 81, sponsored by Rep. Terry Canales, D-Edinburg, would require that information to be available to the public.

The bill, which cleared a key vote in the House on Wednesday, was prompted by the city of McAllen's refusal to release records about how much it paid pop singer Enrique Iglesias for performing at a holiday concert. News reports later showed the city lost more than half a million dollars on the event. [Emphasis mine]

The proposal appears to be but a slice of a larger transparency push in the Lone Star State. Later in the article, Kelley Shannon, executive director of the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas, made that clear, and also made a policy point that we often make—that if governments can spend it, they should report it to you:

“Taxpayers have an absolute right to see how their money is spent, whether on small
projects or large ones,” Shannon said. “This, along with other transparency proposals at the Capitol, will help repair and strengthen the Texas Public Information Act.”

Our own work showed that some Missouri cities are willing to charge the public thousands, and even tens of thousands of dollars, to see what they’re spending the public’s money on. That is bad policy and completely contrary to objectives of good governance. Cities already have to file financial reports with the state that are based around their revenue and spending practices; it is altogether reasonable that the underlying transactions that form those reports be made available to the state and the public.

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Patrick Ishmael is the director of government accountability at the Show-Me Institute.

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Links

[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUnu9hLHkV4

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Advancing liberty with responsibility by promoting market solutions for Missouri public policy.

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