

# Authority misbehavior a symptom of oversight, says Stockton report

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by Scott Fein

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## Authority misbehavior a symptom of oversight, says Stockton report

By Melinda Caliendo

The headline-making stories of abuse and scandal at the state's authorities shouldn't be a surprise, according to a new report issued by the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton College.

According to **David Carr**, a professor of political science, the lack of consistent oversight and inadequate monitoring systems for agencies at every level of government has left the state open to misrepresented spending and a lack of transparency.

The report looked at the oversight of seven bistate authorities, 587 local authorities, 35 state authorities and at least four regional authorities. Many have the ability to tax or impose user fees, create debt, accept grants, and contract for products and services.

Because there is no one governing body for the multitude of authorities, Carr said finding information on spending and debt is beyond what is expected from an average, engaged citizen,

keeping these independent bodies “shadow governments.” The numbers used for reporting and the fiscal calendars are inconsistent throughout the state.

“While many authorities have independent sources of revenue in the form of tolls or user fees, New Jersey’s citizens are the major source of these revenues as users of these services,” Carr said in the report. He estimates New Jersey authorities — from local to bistate — spend at least \$10 billion a year, and have debt of \$40 billion.

Carr said the fragmentation of authorities in the state was first publicly identified nearly 30 years ago, but despite reform being on the agenda for each incoming governor, little progress has been made. Carr suggests standardizing fiscal calendars and reporting metrics, as well as establishing a governing body to oversee all authorities, like the Authorities Budget Office in New York, would be a “comprehensive and systematic approach” to increasing transparency.

Carr also suggests a comprehensive annual report, with a simplified summary, similar to the state’s “Citizen’s Guide to the Budget” as another way to increase access to the financial activities of authorities

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