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Taking a stand for taxpayers: They deserve their day in court

EDITORIAL

The New Hampshire House should take an important step to restoring accountability to New Hampshire government. It should put CACR 5 (http://gencourt.state.nh.us/bill_status/results.aspx?lsr=927&sortoption=&txtsessionyear=2015&txtbillnumber=cacr5) on the ballot next fall.

The House Judiciary Committee takes up the proposed constitutional amendment today. Approving it would return to taxpayers the ability to challenge illegal government actions in court.

For nearly 150 years taxpayers had the right to file a lawsuit if they believed local or state government spent their money illegally. That changed in 2010 when the state Supreme Court ruled there was no authority for taxpayer standing.

The Legislature quickly tried to fix this, passing a bipartisan taxpayer standing statute. Last year, the court threw that statute out, saying taxpayers must show specific harm in order to bring suit. But all taxpayers are harmed when government breaks the laws restraining it. How else can rogue officials be brought to heel if the case can't even be brought into court?

Three Manchester aldermen recently voted on a contract with the teachers union in violation of ethics requirements. Since their fellow aldermen won't hold them accountable, city taxpayers are suing. The lack of taxpayer standing may keep that case from being heard.

CACR 5 would restore taxpayer standing, and provide an important check on elected officials who mispend our money. The Senate has already voted unanimously to put this vital amendment on the ballot. The House should do likewise.