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52 boards, agencies flush at year's end

BY MICHAEL WICKLINE ([CONTACT](#))

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LITTLE ROCK — A report showed Thursday that 52 regulatory boards and agencies had cash and

investment balances of \$50 million at the end of the past fiscal year, so some state lawmakers questioned whether some boards have too much.

"That's a pretty good chunk of change there in state government," said Rep. Robert Moore, D-Arkansas City.

The Legislative Audit Division reported, for example, that the Securities Department had a \$12 million balance; **the Board of Collection Agencies, \$5.9 million**; the Contractors Licensing Board, \$3.6 million; the Board of Nursing, \$2.9 million; the Motor Vehicle Commission, \$2.6 million; the Real Estate Commission, \$2.5 million; the Medical Board, \$2.2 million; and the Board of Pharmacy, \$2.1 million.

Deputy Legislative Auditor Mitzi Ferguson told a legislative panel studying state regulatory boards and social welfare commissions that the Securities Department is an executive agency that has enough staff to provide adequate financial safeguards, although it lacks a regulatory board.

Moore said a handful of boards, financed with licensing fees, had balances of \$1 million to \$5 million despite having only a few staff members and reporting that they planned to use their balances for operating expenses. He declined to cite particular boards.

He said lawmakers might consider developing a formula under which any money the boards have beyond 120 percent of their operating expenses would flow into state general revenue to finance other state government operations. License fees are considered "special" revenue, earmarked for

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specific purposes, rather than "general" revenue, which may be appropriated for broad state-government purposes.

"There are some cash-funded agencies that live pretty good," he said.

Sen. Jerry Taylor, D-Pine Bluff, said enacting such a formula might cause some boards to reduce their licensing fees.

"We don't want to discourage them from being frugal," he said.

The Legislative Joint Auditing Committee's subcommittee studying regulatory boards decided to direct the Legislative Audit Division and the Department of Finance and Administration to develop recommendations to make the boards' operations more efficient and effective.

One option would be to establish a state office to handle the boards' administrative and financial duties, Ferguson said. Another option would be for the department to provide more services to the boards to avoid financial irregularities, she said.

Paul Louthian, the state's accounting administrator, said another option would be to have more involvement by board members in overseeing the regulatory boards.

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