



The 113th General Assembly convened its second year of the two-year session on January 9th and adjourned on April 25th. Highlights of this year’s session included passage of a \$1.9 billion franchise tax cut and refund for businesses, an unsuccessful effort to expand school vouchers statewide, and continued debate on legislation dealing with public safety, gun laws, and abortion. (i)

ThinkTennessee monitored more than 200 bills this session relating to our policy priorities of **strengthening democracy** and **supporting working families**. A total of 55 passed into law, 22 failed, 8 passed in only one chamber, 26 were discussed and ultimately dismissed, and 99 (including 58 from 2023) were not discussed at all.

KEY UPDATES

 Municipalities have new tools to help provide more **affordable housing** including:


- Offering **voluntary incentives** to housing developers, and
- **Amending building codes** to no longer require automatic fire sprinkler systems for certain units.


 New laws both expand and restrict **voting access**, including:

- **Increased access to absentee voting** for Tennesseans with a print disability,
- Starting after this year’s elections, voters will have a **shorter window to request absentee ballots** (the request deadline will become 10 days before Election Day instead of seven days), and
- New restrictions on **collecting voter registration applications**.

 A new study into **child care availability and affordability challenges**. A TACIR report expected in January 2025 will study:

- The laws and regulations for starting child-care businesses to identify any that are unnecessarily burdensome, and
- The child-care workforce to consider methods to support and retain child-care workers.

 High school students may now earn six credits (up from three) per school year in a **work-based learning program**.

 The Administrative Office of the Courts will develop a **centralized case-management system** to collect and document easily accessible and uniform court data.

WHAT'S INSIDE?

Highlights of bills that passed into law and those that were discussed but failed to pass related to:



STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

- **Civic Engagement:** Voting Policies
- **Good Governance:** Judicial Integrity and Open Meetings



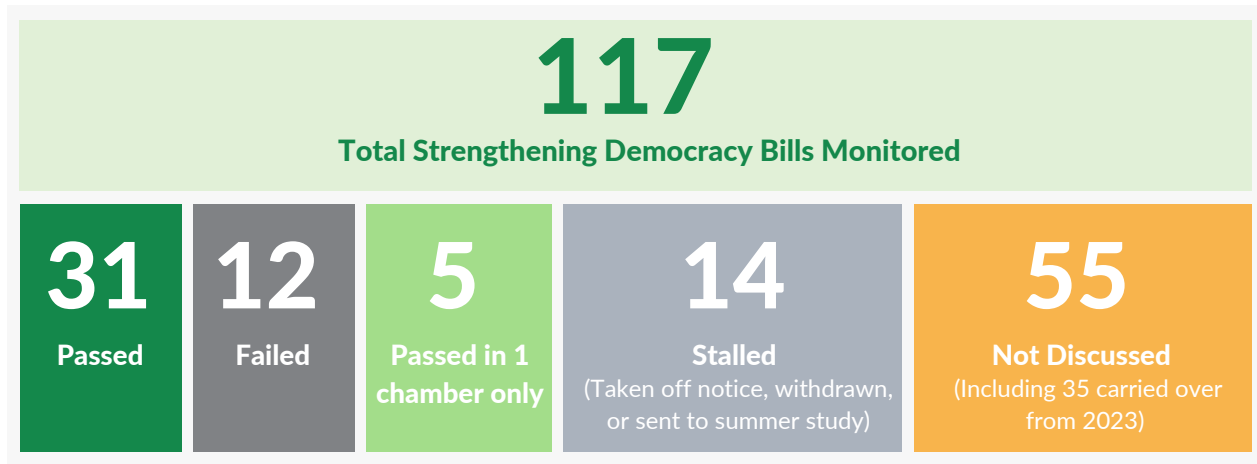
SUPPORTING WORKING FAMILIES

- **Income:** Workers and Workforce and Paid Family Leave
- **Affordability:** Housing, Child Care, and Transportation
- **Debt:** Fines and Fees



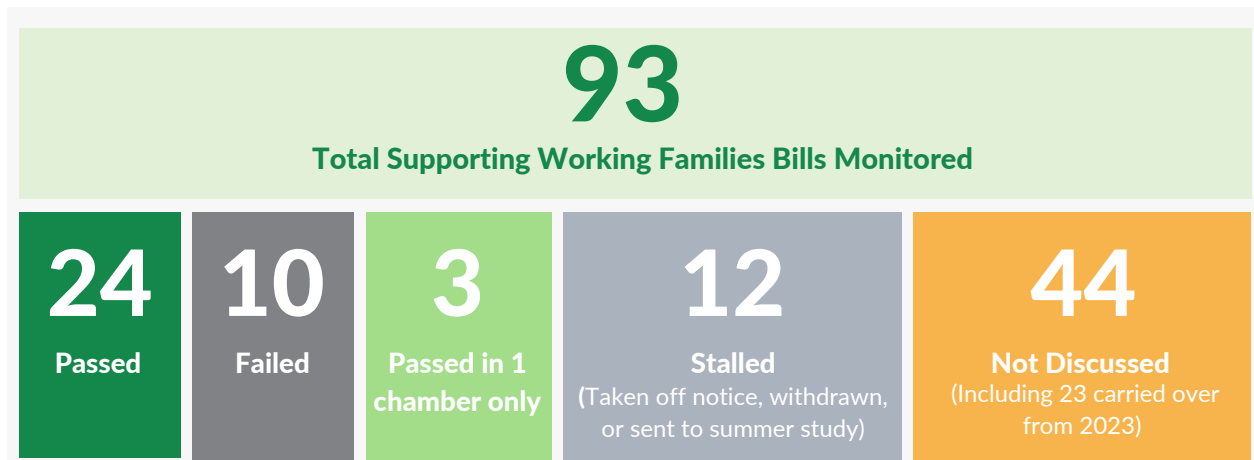
STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

Of the **117 bills** we monitored this session related to our strengthening democracy priority issue area, 31 passed, 12 failed, 5 passed in only one chamber but not the other, and the rest (69 bills) either stalled (e.g., were taken off notice, withdrawn, or sent to summer study) or were not discussed in committee.



SUPPORTING WORKING FAMILIES

Of the **93 bills** we monitored this session related to our supporting working families priority issue area, 24 passed, 10 failed, 3 passed in one chamber but not the other, and the rest (56 bills) either stalled (e.g., were taken off notice, withdrawn, or sent to summer study), or were not discussed in committee.



NEW LAWS PASSED IN 2024

This section highlights some of the laws passed this year across both of our policy priority areas, including those that increase affordability, such as new tools to support more affordable housing options and those that impose new restrictions, such as prohibitions on collecting voter registration applications.

STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

Laws passed this year bring new policies changing **voting procedures and deadlines, judicial districts and oversight, and transparency for state governing bodies and agencies.**

VOTING PROCEDURES AND DEADLINES

New voting laws address policies impacting **voters and advocates, candidates, and election administration.**

Voters and Advocates

Two new absentee voting laws, one expanding and one limiting access, and new restrictions and penalties for collecting voter registration applications passed this year.



HB 2293/SB 2118: “Print Disability Absentee Voting Act” (Davis/Massey) (H: 91-0; S: 32-0)

Effective August 2, 2024, Tennesseans with a print disability may receive an absentee ballot by email. Voters must still physically sign the application and return the ballot by mail.

Rather than relying on assistance at the polling place, low-vision voters may complete their absentee ballot in the privacy of their own homes. (ii)

HB 2294/SB 1967: Shorter Window to Request Absentee Ballots (Rudd/Briggs) (H: 75-17-1; S: 27-6)

Effective November 6, 2024 (*after* this year’s elections), the deadline to request an absentee ballot changes from seven to 10 days before Election Day.

Bill sponsors argued it is difficult for voters to request, complete, and return ballots in time to be counted with the current deadline – Tennessee is the only state to require absentee ballots be returned by mail. (iii) The bill shortens the window available to request an absentee ballot to allow voters more time for ballots to be received.

HB 1955/SB 2586: New Rules and Prohibitions for Collecting Voter Registration Applications (Rudd/Taylor) (H: 73-23; S: 27-4)

Effective May 1, 2024, non-election officials collecting voter registration applications must submit applications within **15 days** of the date the application is signed. (iv) Additionally, they may not: (1) **pre-fill a voter registration application** before providing it to anyone, (2) **alter a voter registration application** without the applicant’s knowledge and consent, or (3) allow anyone convicted of three types of felonies – **election-related felonies, aggravated perjury, or offenses of financial exploitation of elderly or vulnerable persons** – to collect or handle voter registration applications. (v) Altering applications or allowing those individuals to collect applications are both subject to a **new \$5,000 civil penalty.** (vi)

Though originally introduced with a requirement for non-election officials conducting voter-registration drives to register beforehand with the secretary of state, that provision was amended out of the final version.

Candidates

Two new laws impact candidates, one prohibiting elected officials from serving in a municipal and county governing body at the same time, and one creating new guidelines and processes for presidential electors.



✓ **HB 2937/SB 2928: Prohibition on Serving on a County and Municipal Governing Body** (C. Johnson/Powers) (H: 84-8; S: 22-9)

Effective April 22, 2024, counties with a population over 200,000 may choose to prevent anyone from serving on both a municipal and county governing body at the same time. (vii) Officials currently serving in both positions may complete their terms.

✓ **HB 1794/SB 1723: “Uniform Faithful Presidential Electors Act”** (Rudd/Lowe) (H: 72-16-4; S: 27-0-3)

Effective April 23, 2024, a new process defines how presidential electors cast votes for president. (viii) Political parties nominate, and voters elect, electors to cast their party’s vote for president.

This legislation creates a process to select alternate electors, requires electors and alternates pledge to cast their vote for the candidate their political party has chosen, *i.e.*, they cannot vote however they choose, and removes the option of voting for the candidate of their choice if the party’s candidate has died. (ix)

Election Administration

New laws also impact the people who administer elections, County Election Commissions and administrators.



✓ **HB 2391/SB 2524: New Date Voting at Nursing Homes May Begin** (Lafferty/Niceley) (H: 67-21; S: 26-5)

Effective April 22, 2024, on-site voting at nursing homes may start two days later – 27 rather than 29 days before Election Day. County Election Commissions conduct on-site voting for those living in nursing homes and assisted care facilities or independent living facilities on the same properties. (x)

Bill sponsors cited the rare possibility that a nursing home resident could currently register and vote on the same day if the 30-day voter registration deadline falls on a holiday or weekend. (xi)

✓ **HB 1799/SB 1706: Required Notice of Election Administrator Trainings** (Rudd/Hensley) (H: 78-18; S: 27-4)

Effective May 1, 2024, election administrators must submit a report to the coordinator of elections detailing any out-of-state training, seminar, conference, or other educational event related to elections that they attend. (xii)

Initially introduced as requiring those *providing* the training to county election commissioners to receive prior approval from the secretary of state’s office, the bill was first amended to require all county election officials to seek prior approval and then finally amended to require only administrators to report such activity after attendance.

✓ **HB 1897/SB 1768: Election Administrator Recusal** (Rudd/Lundberg) (H: 87-4-1; S: 28-0)

Effective March 15, 2024, newly appointed county election administrators must be recused from official duties at least 30 days before an election in which an immediate family member is running for office in the county.

Bill sponsors said the legislation is meant to align with the similar recusal policy for county election commissioners, and it initially sought to similarly withhold pay from administrators during the recusal period. But the final version passed includes compensation for the administrators, who unlike election commissioners, are full-time positions. (xiii)



New laws add and remove judges from judicial districts, change rules for overseeing judicial commissioners, and call for new data capabilities and reporting requirements.

Judicial Districts

Legislators have long highlighted the need for additional and equitable judicial resources across the state, but not all requests have received funding. This year, three new laws add judges to judicial districts, with two new positions created and two moved from one district to two others.



HB 2715/SB 1838: New Trial Court Judge in 18th Judicial District (Garrett/Haile) (H: 95-0; S: 32-0)

Effective September 1, 2024, the 18th judicial district (Sumner County) will have a new trial court with a judge initially appointed by the governor and then elected by district voters in the August 2026 election to serve until the next judicial election in August 2030. The legislation was funded in the governor’s budget.

HB 1830/SB 2855: New Circuit Court Judge in 23rd Judicial District (Littleton/Roberts) (H: 91-0; S: 30-0)

Effective September 1, 2024, the 23rd judicial district (Dickson, Houston, Humphreys, and Stewart counties) will have a new circuit court with a judge initially appointed by the governor and then elected by district voters in the August 2026 election to serve until the next judicial election in August 2030. The legislation was funded in the governor’s budget amendment.

HB 2002/SB 2517: Two Judges Removed From 30th and Placed in 4th and 19th Judicial Districts (Farmer/Niceley) (H: 69-25; S: 22-9)

Effective September 1, 2024, a Shelby County circuit court, which is vacant as of September 1 (the current judge has been appointed to the Tennessee Supreme Court), and a criminal court which is vacant as of July 1 (the current judge resigned), are eliminated from the 30th judicial district. (xiv)

Initially, separate bills sought to add a judge to the 4th and 19th districts, but the efforts were combined into one bill. Sponsors argued that Shelby County has been consistently “over-judged,” and the two soon-to-be vacant positions could be removed and given to the 4th and 19th districts. The two new judges will be similarly appointed by the governor and then elected by district voters in the August 2026 election to serve until the next judicial election in August 2030.

Judicial Oversight

A new law changes the process for overseeing judicial commissioners (appointed positions that can issue arrest and search warrants, set and approve bonds, and appoint attorneys for indigent defendants among other things) in some counties.



HB 1716/SB 2186: Oversight of Judicial Commissioners to Rotate Among General Sessions Judges (Gillespie/Taylor) (H: 65-19-3; S: 29-1)

Effective April 23, 2024, in counties where judicial commissioners are managed by general sessions judges (in counties with more than one general sessions judge), management will rotate between the judges.

Bill sponsors argued that exposure to multiple judges and judicial philosophies will provide a more well-rounded experience for the appointed commissioners.

Data and Reporting Requirements

The availability of court-related data has been a challenge for policymakers and advocates, but two new laws will improve access to court data to help streamline accessibility and inform resource allocation.



- ✓ **HB 2930/SB 2689: Development of a Centralized Court Case-Management System** (Sexton/White) (H: 90-7-1; S: 31-0)

Effective May 6, 2024, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is tasked with developing a centralized case-management system for collecting and documenting easily reportable, retrievable, accessible, and uniform court case data. They are required to provide written progress updates to the legislature and governor every six months beginning on January 31, 2025, until the system is implemented. The governor allocated \$75 million for this system in last year's budget.

- ✓ **HB 2791/SB 2059: Required Report on Juvenile Court Compliance with Data Sharing** (Littleton/Walley) (H: 84-7-2; S: 27-0)

Effective April 11, 2024, the AOC must submit a report to the legislature of any juvenile court that has not reported monthly statistics on juvenile cases as required and steps to take to bring the court into compliance. Bill sponsors cited the need for accurate data to help provide the necessary resources.



GOOD GOVERNANCE

Legislation to increase transparency in state governing bodies and agencies and to clarify the state legislative exemption from sunshine laws both passed this year.

Open Meetings and Records

New laws address state governing body meeting requirements, meetings between state and local governing body members, and an open records policy for the Department of Tourist Development.



- ✓ **HB 2934/SB 2741: State Governing Bodies Also Required to Post Agendas in Advance** (Bricken/Gardenhire) (H: 94-0; S: 30-0)

Effective April 11, 2024, state governing bodies must provide an agenda that reasonably describes the matters acted upon during a public meeting at least 48 hours in advance. The legislation adds state governing bodies to the existing requirements for local governing bodies.

- ✓ **HB 2373/SB 2813: Meetings with Local Legislative Body Members and State Legislative Body Members Not Subject to Sunshine Law** (Terry/Reeves) (H: 88-0; S: 31-0)

Effective April 29, 2024, this legislation clarifies that meetings between members of local legislative bodies and their state legislative delegation are not subject to the state's sunshine law if the meeting is just an exchange of information or discussion of state matters. (xv)

State legislators are exempt from the sunshine laws requiring meetings of members of a governing body to be open to the public. (xvi)



HB 1692/SB 2093: New Department of Tourist Development Public Records Policy (Lamberth/Johnson) (H: 73-17; S: 23-6-2)

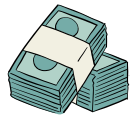
Effective April 22, 2024, the Department of Tourist Development adopts an open records policy opening the department's documents for inspection by the public, with certain exceptions to protect trade secrets and confidentiality.

Committees debated the length of time information would remain confidential and initial language describing the process for the department commissioner and attorney general to determine when information was to be deemed sensitive and required confidentiality. (xvii) The bill was amended from information that would "adversely impact the department's ability to carry out its statutory functions" to that which would "seriously harm the ability of the state to negotiate events, contracts, agreements, or administer grant programs."



SUPPORTING WORKING FAMILIES

Laws passed this year include opportunities to increase Tennesseans' income and the affordability of housing and child care, as well as a new court-ordered restitution debt.



INCOME

New laws increase access to the workforce for high school students, limit the time workers may make employment claims for unpaid wages, and expand paid leave for more Tennessee workers.

Workers and Workforce

Legislators passed two pro-worker laws increasing access to the workforce and one limiting the time employees have to file employment claims.



HB 2059/SB 1853: Increased Work-Based Learning Credits for High School Students (T. Hicks/Lowe) (H: 89-0; S: 32-0)

Effective March 7, 2024, high school students may earn up to six credits (instead of three) in a school year from work-based learning programs. Bill discussion highlighted the benefits of programs providing hands-on work experience.



HB 2940/SB 2791: "TennCare for Working Individuals with Disabilities Act" (T. Hicks/Watson) (H: 98-0; S: 31-0)

By January 1, 2025, the Tennessee Division of TennCare will establish a buy-in program allowing working individuals with disabilities to pay a premium to access Medicaid long-term supports and services.

Currently, income and resource requirements for long-term supports and services limit eligibility, preventing some individuals with disabilities who want to work from doing so in order to keep the services.



HB 2113/SB 2017: Shortened Statute of Limitations for Employment Claims from 6 years to 3 (Powers/Reeves) (H: 69-23; S: 25-4-1)

Effective July 1, 2024, Tennessee employees will have three years to bring claims for unpaid wages, hours worked, overtime, minimum wage, salary, bonuses, or commissions owed. Bill sponsors argued that class action claims can be made for up to six years and limiting such claims to three years brings Tennessee into line with the maximum federal statute of limitations under the Federal Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

Paid Family Leave

Building off of last year's paid leave benefit for some state employees after the birth or adoption of a child, one new law and one joint resolution aim to expand access to the benefit.



HB 2697/SB 2655: Public Charter School Employees Included in 6-Week Paid Family Leave Policy (Moody/White) (H: 94-0; S: 32-0)

Effective May 1, 2024, eligible public charter school employees will receive six weeks of paid leave after the birth, stillbirth, or adoption of a newly placed minor child. (xviii) Bill sponsors said that last year's legislation intended to include public charter school employees but it was unclear and required clarification.

SJR 0848: Resolution Urging Development of a Paid Family Caregiving Policy and Program (Yager/Stevens, Doggett) (H: 88-3; S: 32-0)

By January 2025, the Long-Term Services and Supports within the Division of TennCare is urged to develop a comprehensive, statewide Paid Family Leave Caregiving Policy and Program in collaboration with consumers, stakeholders, and advocates.

The resolution recognizes financial support for family caregivers as a cost-effective investment for the state. It calls for a study citing the projected increase in the number of older Tennesseans and those living with disabilities who will require caregiving, and the challenges to recruit and retain formal paid caregivers.



AFFORDABILITY

New laws provide more opportunities to increase the supply of affordable housing and child care in Tennessee.

Child Care

Legislators discussed the state's "child-care crisis" this session, calling on the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) to study child care needs. A final report on the issues will be presented to the TACIR commission for approval in January 2025. (xix)



HB 2317/SB 2374: TACIR Study on Operation and Expansion of Child-Care Businesses (Williams/Watson) (H: 95-0; S: 33-0)

Effective May 6, 2024, this legislation calls on TACIR to complete a study of state and local laws and rules that govern the start-up, operation, and expansion of child-care businesses in Tennessee. The report will cover rules and regulations that might be limiting the growth of child-care businesses due to financial burdens and operating delays on child-care business owners, due to costs or that are unnecessary for health and safety.

HB 2232/SB 2063: TACIR Study on Child-Care Worker Landscape (Freeman/Oliver) (H: 74-15-3; S: 30-0)

Effective May 6, 2024, this legislation similarly calls on TACIR to conduct a study on child care. This study would look at the current landscape of child-care workers, including their racial and demographic makeup, salary, and tenure, as well as the feasibility of a program that would cover child-care costs for child-care workers in the state, and opportunities to expand financial support for early childhood educators.

Legislators also discussed the “housing crisis” facing the state, particularly the affordability and availability of housing options for the state’s growing workforce. New laws passed this session to address both affordability and availability include zoning reforms and new funding mechanisms.



Zoning Reform

✓ **HB 2623/SB 2496: Municipalities Allowed to Offer Voluntary Incentives to Property Developers** (Carr/Gardenhire) (H: 69-23-1; S: 30-1)

Effective July 1, 2024, municipalities can choose to offer voluntary incentives, e.g., expedited permitting, reduced setbacks, and density bonuses, to developers to help lower construction costs and encourage development of more diverse housing.

Previously prohibited from offering zoning incentives, localities had been limited to other tools, e.g., public funding allocations or land, to try to incentivize the development of affordable housing.

See ThinkTennessee’s [“Tennessee Cities Have a New Housing Tool”](#) policy brief.

✓ **HB 2787/SB 2635: Prohibit Mandating Automatic Fire Sprinkler Systems for Some Multi-Family Dwellings** (Barrett/Rose) (H: 61-23-12; S: 31-0)

Effective July 1, 2024, local governments may amend their building code for three- and four-family dwellings to no longer mandate automatic fire sprinkler systems in structures under 5,000 square feet in area and less than three stories high as long as other conditions, e.g., a two-hour, fire-resistant rating for separation walls, exist.

Bill sponsors argued communities would be able to lower housing costs and provide more attainable housing.

Funding Reform

✓ **HB 2368/SB 2315: “Residential Infrastructure Development Act of 2024”** (Carr/Pody) (H: 94-0; S 30-0)

Effective May 1, 2024, local governments will have the authority to create infrastructure development districts and fund or finance capital infrastructure, e.g., streets, sidewalks, water, or telecommunications, for development. Sponsors shared their intention that the Act will provide municipalities with alternative methods to fund or finance projects that will help provide affordable housing.

✓ **HB 1229/SB 1137: Local Governments Allowed to Provide Credit Support for Bonds Issued by Industrial Development Boards** (Hemmer/Oliver) (H: 68-20-5; S: 26-3)

Effective May 28, 2024, municipalities may aid or otherwise provide assistance to industrial development corporations by contributing revenues (other than that derived from property tax revenues) toward multi-family housing facilities for low-to-moderate income, elderly, or handicapped individuals.

Bill sponsors described this as another tool in the toolbox for providing attainable workforce housing.



HB 2797/SB 2182: Framework for Industrial Development Corporations in Certain Areas to Accept and Make Loans and Grants to Install Public Infrastructure (Hulsey/Lundberg) (H: 91-4; S: 29-0)

Effective May 9, 2024, industrial development corporations in “housing opportunity” counties or municipalities – defined as having acute needs for additional housing to support an expected population growth as a result of economic development projects expected to bring more than 1,000 employees – may accept state and federal funding and make loans or grants to third parties to install public infrastructure for residential developments.

Bill sponsors cited the need for affordable housing in the state, particularly to support Blue Oval employees. The bill establishes the framework of the program but does not provide the state funding for loans or grants.



HB 1046/SB 1000: “Tennessee Rural and Workforce Housing Act” (Vaughan/Yager) (H: 94-0-1; S: 31-0)

Effective July 1, 2025, the Tennessee Housing Development Agency will create a state rural and workforce housing tax credit for qualified projects after January 1, 2026, that receive a federal housing tax credit. Bill sponsors cited 25 other states with a similar program to supplement the federal housing tax credit program. The bill serves as enacting legislation to establish the program, but no funding has yet been allocated to it.



HB 2984/SB 2968: Establish the East Bank Development Authority (Freeman/Campbell) (H: 59-18-3; S: 24-3-2)

Signed into law on May 28, 2024, and effective following a two-thirds approval from the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, the East Bank Development Authority (EBDA) is established to promote the economic development of the East Bank of the Cumberland River in Nashville.

Sponsors presented the EBDA as the best way to protect the state’s investment in the new football stadium and professionalize, rather than politicize, oversight of the area’s development. It is governed by a board of directors with nine voting members: the speakers of the Senate and House (or their designees) and seven appointed members (five by the mayor and two by the Metro Council).

Transportation

Legislation to stay updated on the state’s progress towards a passenger rail system passed this year.



HB 2070/SB 1807: Require Annual Report on Department of Transportation’s Progress on Rail and Public Transportation Efforts (Powell/Campbell) (H: 75-11-6; S: 31-0)



By January 1, 2025, and each year following, the Department of Transportation is required to submit a report to the legislature with state and federal progress on passenger and freight rail and public transportation efforts.

Bill sponsors described the progress reports as updates on the department’s path towards implementing recommendations coming from last year’s TACIR report looking into passenger rail. (xx)



DEBT

Legislators also debated public safety and crime, particularly in Shelby County, leading to a new court-ordered financial penalty for some parents or guardians.

Fines and Fees

Parents or guardians of juveniles found to be delinquent multiple times may now face a new court-ordered restitution fine.



HB 1930/SB 2571: “Parental Accountability Act” (Gillespie/Taylor) (H: 72-24-2; S: 24-5-1)

Effective July 1, 2024, parents or guardians of juveniles who have been found delinquent a second or subsequent time may be subject to an order of restitution not to exceed \$1,000. For acts that would be a misdemeanor if committed by an adult, the order must be at least \$250, and for felonies, at least \$500.

Bill sponsors, both from Shelby County, cited the need to hold parents accountable for what their children were doing and introduced the bill initially as a required financial penalty in all cases. Committee debate in both chambers centered around concerns about the negative impacts the charge would have on families who are struggling financially and on foster parents' willingness to foster when they may be held financially accountable for acts occurring prior to their guardianship.

Following debate, the bill was amended from requiring the restitution order to allowing judges to take the family's specific situation – financial and otherwise – into consideration.



LEGISLATION DISCUSSED BUT NOT PASSED IN 2024

Legislators discussed additional bills that did not pass this year but began or continued important conversations on ThinkTennessee’s policy priorities of strengthening democracy and supporting working families. Unlike last year, bills that have stalled this year will not carry over as this is the final year in the two-year legislative session. To be considered again, these bills will need to be reintroduced in a new session.



STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

Bills discussed but not passed include attempts at voting rights restoration reforms, consolidating elections, and excluding members who were expelled for disorderly conduct from being eligible to return to the legislature.



VOTING POLICIES

This session saw the return of some familiar proposals and the introduction of new ones impacting voters, candidates, and election administration.

Voters

Failed or stalled proposals impacting voters include reforming the rights restoration processes (both voting and full citizenship rights) and clarifying who can participate in political party primary elections.



Voting Rights Restoration Process

Legislators discussed multiple proposals to address processes to restore both voting rights and full citizenship rights – both lost after a felony conviction – though none passed into law.

◆ Voting Rights Restoration Process Reforms ◆

Bills sought to streamline the voting rights restoration process by reducing the steps required to regain eligibility.

HB 1256/SB 1241: Remove Legal Financial Obligations Other than Restitution and Change the Permanent Disenfranchisement to Eligible After Three Years (Camper/Akbari)

This bill sought to remove two of the three legal financial obligation requirements for eligibility to have voting rights restored – court costs and child support (but not restitution) – and to replace the permanent disenfranchisement for certain convictions with a three-year waiting period after sentence completion.

The bill was only presented in the House (it was not discussed in the Senate), where it failed with a 7-5 roll call vote.

HB 0279/SB 0904: Allow Those on a Payment Plan for Back-Owed Child Support to be Eligible for Rights Restoration (McKenzie/Akbari)

Tennessee is the only state to require those who have lost their voting rights due to a felony conviction to be current on any back-owed child support before regaining their voting rights. This bill would have clarified that individuals making payments on their child support would be eligible.

This bill was also only presented in the House and failed in subcommittee on a voice vote.



HB 0687/SB 0730 (Freeman/Campbell) and HB 2415/ SB 2867 (Dixie/Oliver): Automatically Restore Voting Rights after Sentence Completion

Two bills sought to remove additional requirements, e.g., paying financial obligations and submitting applications, to instead restore voting rights immediately upon release from incarceration.

HB 0687/SB 0730 was not presented in the Senate and was withdrawn in House subcommittee after a brief discussion. HB 2415/SB 2867 similarly was not presented in the Senate and failed in House subcommittee.

◆ Full Citizenship Rights Restoration Process Reforms ◆

Two bills sought to reform the process for restoring full citizenship rights (which are now a prerequisite for getting voting rights restored). Both bills passed through initial committees before stalling.



HB 2417/SB 2166: Streamline the Separate Processes for Restoring Full Citizenship Rights (Dixie/Yarbro)

Tennessee Code includes three different processes to restore full citizenship rights depending on the year of conviction. (xxi) This bill sought to remove the processes for convictions received between July 1, 1986, and July 1, 1996, whose requirements are substantially different than the other two time periods.

The bill passed out of Senate committee unanimously and was placed on the Floor calendar before being taken off notice. It was discussed in House subcommittee before being deferred to summer study.



HB 2380/SB 2913: Allow Restoration of Individual Citizenship Rights (Parkinson/Bailey)

As of July 2023, state law is being interpreted as requiring the restoration of full citizenship rights, e.g., the right to serve on a jury, run for office, and bear arms, (or receive a pardon) before voting rights can be restored. (xxii) This legislation proposed allowing Tennesseans to restore individual citizenship rights rather than all of them.

It similarly passed unanimously out of Senate committee and was placed on the Floor calendar and discussed in House subcommittee before being deferred to summer study.

Participation in Party Primary Elections

Two bills sought to address confusion around who can participate in a political party's primary elections.



HB 1616/SB 2631: Allow Registration by Political Party (Richey/Pody)

An attempt to allow voters to register as Republican, Democrat, or unaffiliated passed through initial House committees before being taken off notice and failing in Senate committee.

The legislation would have required registered Republicans and Democrats to vote in that party's primary and allowed unaffiliated voters to participate in whichever party primary they chose.



HB 2634/SB 2345: Remove the Requirement to be a "Bona Fide" Party Member (McKenzie/Yarbro)

Legislation attempting to remove two requirements dealing with how Tennessee voters participate in primary elections failed in House subcommittee and was not discussed in the Senate.

The bill would have removed both (1) the requirement stating that voters be a bona fide member of, affiliated with, or declare allegiance to a political party in order to vote in that party's primary, (xxiii) and (2) the required warning sign in primary polling places stating that it was against the law to participate otherwise. (xxiv)

Candidates

Failed or stalled proposals impacting candidates include use of campaign funds for child care, disclosures on AI-generated communications, elected official recall processes, legislative candidate re-eligibility after expulsion, and the eligibility to hold more than one office.



Campaign Funds for Child-Care Costs



HB 0751/SB 0796: Using Campaign Funds to Cover Child-Care Costs (Powell/Oliver)

Introduced last year, this legislation would have allowed candidates to use left-over campaign funds to reimburse their child-care expenses resulting from campaign-related events.

The bill was withdrawn after sponsors shared that the Bureau of Ethics and Campaign Finance revealed that while not explicitly stated in state law, the agency considers this an allowable use of funds. They agreed in committee testimony to provide the information on the agency's website.

AI-Generated Campaign Communication



HB 2185/SB 2057 (Hemmer/Yarbro) and HB 2501/SB 2386 (Jones/Kyle): Disclaimers on Political Communications Created with AI

Two attempts to require candidates, political campaign committees, or other entities who create or disseminate political ads with artificial intelligence to include a disclaimer and to prohibit distribution of deceptive information failed in House subcommittee and were not presented in the Senate.

Elected Official Recall Process



HB 1818/SB 1580: Establish a Recall Process for Non-Constitutional Officers (Butler/Lowe)

An attempt to create a recall process for elected officials other than constitutional officers, e.g, the governor, legislators, judges, treasurer, comptroller, secretary of state, and county elected officials, passed through initial House committees before stalling in the Senate.

The legislation proposed allowing a voter to petition for a recall to be held if the petition received as many signatures as at least 66% of the total votes received at that elected official's most recent regular election. Committee discussion raised concerns about creating a process for some elected officials and not others and that the bar for required signatures could be too low for some local elected offices based on low turnout levels.

Prohibition on Holding More Than One Office



HB 2080/SB 1968: Prohibit Holding More than One Elected Office (Wright/Briggs)

This legislation sought to prohibit a candidate from seeking more than one office at a time in an election and from holding a local and state elected office at the same time. Bill sponsors cited the expense of a special election that would be required to fill one of the seats if a candidate was elected to both, and the belief that constituents would best be served with an elected official whose focus was not split across multiple positions.

The bill passed the Senate (17-15-1) and made it to the House Floor before being withdrawn.

Legislative Candidate Eligibility

Three bills or resolutions attempted in different ways to prevent a legislator who has been expelled for disorderly conduct from returning to the legislature.



HB 2716/SB 2634: Prohibit Local Legislative Bodies from Electing a Legislator who was Expelled for Disorderly Behavior to Fill the Vacancy (Garrett/Haile)

Legislation to prevent a legislator who has been expelled for disorderly behavior from immediately returning to the legislature passed the full House (69-22-3) but was deferred to summer study in Senate committee.

This proposal would have prohibited the expelled member's local legislative body from returning the member to the position but would not have disqualified them from running for the seat again.



HJR 0706: Prevent a Member Expelled for Disorderly Conduct from Being Eligible to Serve in the Legislature for Four Years Following Expulsion (Richey)

This proposed constitutional amendment sought to prevent an expelled member from being eligible to serve in either chamber again for four years.

The resolution passed through initial House committees and was taken off notice in House Finance subcommittee.



HJR 0797: Prohibit an Expelled Member from Serving or Being Employed in the Legislature (Powers)

This proposed amendment to the constitution would have removed the current language prohibiting an expulsion a second time for the same offense and added language disqualifying any legislator who has been expelled for disorderly behavior from serving or being employed by either the House or Senate.

It also passed through initial House committees and was taken off notice in House Finance subcommittee.

Election Administration

Legislation impacting election administration – from consolidating election cycles to providing polling place restrooms – also failed or stalled this session.



Consolidating Election Cycles

Two new attempts, and one carried over from last year to consolidate local elections with state and federal election cycles failed to pass.



HB 2770/SB 2609: Align Municipal Elections with the August and November Election Cycles (Lafferty/Niceley)

An effort to require cities to move their municipal elections to the same August primary and November general election cycle as state and federal offices failed in House subcommittee and was not presented in the Senate.

The House sponsor presented the bill as an opportunity to save money and improve turnout, but committee members rejected the idea of requiring cities to make the change.



HB 2891/SB 2924: Align Local School Board With State and Federal Election Cycles (Todd/Bailey)

An effort to similarly align local school board elections with the state and federal August and November cycles passed through House committees and the initial Senate committee before stalling.

Initially targeting school board elections broadly, the bill was amended to address only municipal and special school district boards as county school board positions are constitutionally required to be held in August. (xxv)



HJR 0013: Constitutional Amendment to Move Judicial and Civil Offices to the August and November Election Cycles (Lamberth)

Last year, the House passed the first of four required steps to place a constitutional amendment allowing the consolidation of elections on the ballot for voters. Civil and judicial elections are explicitly mentioned in the constitution, so changes to the cycle require a constitutional amendment. (xxvi)

Proposed constitutional amendments must pass both chambers in two consecutive legislative sessions, however the Senate did not take up the amendment this year, ending the proposal’s progress. (xxvii)

Campaign Worker Restrooms



HB 2187/SB 2055: Designate a Restroom Facility Within a Polling Place for Campaign Workers (Powell/Akbari)

A proposal allowing County Election Commissions to allow campaign workers to use a designated polling place restroom passed the Senate unanimously but failed in House subcommittee. The same proposal met a similar fate in 2022. (xxviii)



JUDICIAL INTEGRITY

Legislators proposed but did not pass adding support staff for district attorneys, redrawing the judicial district map, and excluding state legislative rules from state court jurisdiction.

Judicial Resources

Though required by law to provide an annual judicial weighted caseload study assessing resource allocation needs, the comptroller’s office hasn’t released a report since FY 2019, citing the impact of the pandemic and outdated weight formulas. (xxix) Proposals to add or reallocate resources continue to be introduced in the interim, with some passing (see previous section) and others not.



HB 2205/SB 2054 (Barrett/Jackson) **and HB 2582/SB 2157** (Russell/Haile): **Additional Support for District Attorneys**

Two bills argued district attorneys (DAs) are under-resourced and sought additional support. HB 2205/SB 2054 would have let DAs refuse to prosecute cases in municipal courts if the municipality did not provide supportive personnel. (xxx) The bill passed the House (82-13) and through Senate committee before stalling in Finance.

HB 2582/SB 2157 sought additional DA and investigative positions in judicial districts with correctional facilities. The sponsor argued that a law passed last year requiring assaults within prisons to be reported is overloading DAs in these districts with an increased workload. The bill similarly passed in Senate committee before stalling in Finance, and it was not presented in the House.



HB 1350/SB 0305: Redrawn Judicial District Map (Farmer/Lundberg)

This bill proposed redrawing the state judicial district map to realign counties to reflect population growth in Middle Tennessee. Proposed changes included pulling out growing counties into their own districts and combining others into new groupings.

Judicial redistricting has long been discussed in the legislature but they have not redrawn the full judicial district map since the 1980's. Instead, new courts or realignment of counties within districts happen through individual legislation. In 2022, the legislature passed Public Chapter 1098 requiring a 14-member task force of stakeholders and citizens review the need for a new judicial district map, conduct public hearings in each Grand Division to collect testimony from interested organizations and citizens, and then propose a map based on those findings by 2027. (xxxix) A report from a similar task force in 2019 recommended no changes (with one exception). (xxxix)

The bill passed out of Senate committee before stalling in Finance and was not discussed in the House.

Judicial Jurisdiction

Stemming from last year's court decision to block a House rule banning audience members from holding signs in committee meetings, a proposed bill sought to remove state courts' ability to issue rulings on the House or Senate rules adopted by each body.



HB 1652/SB 2225: State Court Jurisdiction Over Legislative Rules (Bulso/Lowe)

Legislation seeking to establish that no state court has jurisdiction over legal challenges to legislative rules, regulations, or procedures passed the House (59-30-5) but failed in Senate committee.

The bill's House sponsor argued in part that the judicial branch had a say on the acts of the legislature but not its rules. Committee discussion in both chambers questioned the constitutionality of such a claim if the rules violated state and federal constitutional rights.



SUPPORTING WORKING FAMILIES

Bills that did not pass this year include proposed solutions to housing and child-care affordability and access as well as efforts to both increase and waive existing fines and fees.



INCOME

In addition to efforts to increase minimum wage and expand a state child tax credit which failed in committees, an effort to expand state employee paid leave to include foster parents failed this year.

Paid Family Leave

An effort to expand the state's paid leave policy to include foster parents passed the Senate but failed in the House.



HB 1554/SB 1545: Six-Week Paid Leave for State Employee Foster Parents (Slater/Rose)

This bill sought to extend last year's six-week paid leave benefit for certain state employees after the birth, stillbirth, or adoption of a child to those who become foster parents of a minor child.

It passed the Senate (30-1) and through initial House committees before failing on the House Floor (44-42-8).




AFFORDABILITY

Additional proposals to address the housing and child-care crises that did not pass this year include housing tax credits and additional zoning reforms and child-care assistance programs.

Housing

Failed proposals sought to leverage additional tax credits and zoning reforms to increase housing affordability and access.



 **HB 1450/SB 0793: Exclude Low-Income Housing Tax Credits in Property Valuation**
(Faison/Stevens)

This legislation proposed prohibiting property assessors from including the value of low-income housing tax credits in the valuation of properties for tax assessments. Bill sponsors argued the legislation would help rural areas offer low-income housing developments, but it was opposed by the property assessors. Initially passing through House committees, it failed in Senate committee.


 **HB 2467/SB 2238: Allow Counties to Adopt a Present Use Property Tax Credit** (Stevens/Yarbro)

This legislation would have allowed counties to create a tax credit for homeowners whose properties have been rezoned, increasing their property taxes. Bill sponsors shared that local governments facing housing challenges may shy away from rezoning areas to help development because of the increased property taxes to existing homeowners.

The bill passed through initial committees in both chambers and was amended to include only metropolitan forms of government in Senate Finance committee before stalling.

 **HB 2423/SB 2237: Allow Counties to Receive a Portion of Revenue Generated from Adoption of Specific Zoning Reforms** (Shaw/Yarbro)

This proposal sought to incentivize housing development by allowing counties to adopt specific zoning reform strategies, such as allowing multi-family units on lots zoned for single-family homes and receiving 5% to 20% of the revenue generated from the recordation tax. It was briefly presented in both chambers and taken off notice.

 **HB 2342/SB 2462 (Pearson/Akbari) and HB 2337/SB 2457 (Pearson/Akbari): New Tennessee Housing Development Agency (THDA) Options for Housing Assistance**

Two bills sought to increase THDA assistance. HB 2342/SB 2462 proposed establishing a first-time homebuyer grant program using federal and state funds. HB 2337/SB 2457 proposed requiring THDA to establish the maximum allowable monthly housing assistance payment.

The bills were not presented in the Senate and failed in House subcommittee for lack of a second.



HB 2439/SB 2239: Authorize Local Governments to Create Land Banks (Sparks/Yarbro)

Introduced briefly in the House before being taken off notice (and not discussed in the Senate), this bill proposed allowing a local government to create land banks to enter into contracts for management, development, and improvements to properties within its region. Currently, the option is limited to certain municipalities, counties, and metropolitan governments that meet population requirements.

The House sponsor cited the state’s workforce housing crisis and the need to have conversations about options, but stated the legislation needed more work.

Child Care

Proposed child-care legislation included new or expanded programs and reimbursement options for schoolteachers.



HB 2233/SB 2064: Expand Eligibility for the Smart Steps Child-Care Program (Freeman/Oliver)

This bill would have expanded eligibility for the Smart Steps child-care payment assistance program to families at 100% of the state median income (up from 85%). Bill sponsors presented it as an opportunity to help middle-income Tennesseans currently exceeding the income eligibility but for whom child care is still unaffordable.

The bill passed through House subcommittee before being taken off notice, and it failed in Senate committee.

HB 2517/SB 1907: Create the “Municipalities’ Access to Child Care” (MATCH) Fund (Harris/Oliver)

This bill would have created a dollar-for-dollar state matching grant fund funded by a new tax on transportation entertainment vehicles to incentivize municipalities to invest in child-care services, including early childhood care and education.

The bill failed in Senate committee and was not presented in the House.



HB 0785/SB 0750: Create the “Promising Futures” Program for Early Childhood and Child-Care Programs (White/Massey)

Introduced last year, this proposed legislation would create a last dollar “Promising Futures” scholarship fund similar to the state’s Tennessee Promise scholarships but for early childhood education. The program sought to combine child-care and early childhood literacy programs and to provide scholarships for attendance to help working Tennessee parents afford child care.

The bill was not discussed this year in the Senate (it passed through committees and was stalled in Finance last year), but it was presented and discussed in the House before being taken off notice.



HB 1927/SB 1901: Authorize Schools to Reimburse Teachers for Child-Care Expenses (Cepicky/Hensley)

This bill proposed allowing schools to create a program to reimburse teachers up to two-thirds of their monthly child-care expenses for services received from certified child-care programs. Reimbursements would be limited to \$1,000 a month and split between the state and the district.

The bill passed through initial committees before being taken off notice in Finance in both chambers.



HB 1962/SB 1805: Require Cost-Estimation Model to Determine Child-Care Reimbursement Rate

(Powell/Oliver)

This bill proposed requiring the Department of Human Services to use a cost-estimate model that incorporates data and other assumptions to estimate the expected costs incurred under different scenarios as well as several factors that account for cost of service delivery when determining the child-care reimbursement rate.

The bill passed through initial committees before being taken off notice in Finance in both chambers. However, it will be included in TACIR's study on child care coming out of two successful bills this session (see page 8).



DEBT

Additional proposals to both increase some available fines and decrease or waive others did not pass this year.

Fines and Fees

Legislators also discussed but did not pass a resolution to allow an increase in municipal code violations and two bills seeking to waive various fines and fees.



HJR 0858: Constitutional Amendment to Authorize Municipalities to Increase Charges for Code Violations

(McKenzie)

This resolution proposed to change the constitution to allow cities to increase municipal code violations from \$50 a day to a higher fee to be capped at no more than \$3,000. The sponsor shared the proposal came from a consortium of mayors struggling with the current \$50 a day fine for non-jury mitigated assessments because it is not large enough to deter violation.

The proposal passed initial House committees before stalling in Finance subcommittee.



HB 2729/SB 2845: Waive Mandatory Minimum for Specific Charge Because of Inability to Pay Driver's License Reinstatement Fee (Faison/Roberts)

This legislation proposed waiving the mandatory minimum 48 hours in jail for someone driving on a license that was revoked because of their first DUI offense. Bill sponsors said that driver's licenses are revoked for one year after a first DUI offense, and Tennesseans must pay \$65 and court costs to have the license reinstated.

They argued that if a person was pulled over for driving without their license, judges should have the discretion to waive the mandatory minimum if they could not afford to pay those fees.

The bill passed the Senate (28-0) and through House committees before being withdrawn on the House Floor.



HB 2390/SB 2242: Removing Two Driver's License Fees (Glynn/Yarbro)

This legislation proposed to waive two fees, (1) for the issuance or renewal of a Class D driver's license (\$26.00 plus a \$2.00 application fee) for adults with income below the federal poverty level, and (2) the hardship license fee (\$3.50 plus a \$2.00 application fee). (xxxiii)

The bill was presented briefly in the Senate and not discussed in the House.

- (i) Jones, Vivian. (April 26, 2024). Tennessee Legislature Adjourns. Here's What Lawmakers Did and Did Not Accomplish This Year. *Tennessean*. See <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/politics/2024/04/26/tennessee-general-assembly-ends-what-lawmakers-did-and-didnt-pass-in-2024/73331667007/>.
- (ii) Committee discussions on the bill shared that tools such as software to enlarge or read text to individuals with low visibility can be used to help these voters complete their ballots at home.
- (iii) Think Tennessee. (February 2024). Tennessee is the Only State to Require Absentee Ballots be Received by Mail by the Close of Polls on Election Day. See <https://www.thinktennessee.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/absentee-application-policy-recommendations.pdf>.
- (iv) Applications were previously required to be submitted within 15 days of receipt (or by the voter registration deadline). This new law explicitly states when that 15-day clock begins.
- (v) Election-related felonies are violations under Title 2 of the Tennessee Code, aggravated perjury is defined in Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-16-702, and exploitation of elderly or vulnerable persons is defined in Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-15-502.
- (vi) Pre-filling a voter registration application is subject to the \$50 civil penalty for violation current prohibitions. Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-2-142(g).
- (vii) Currently, this applies only to Davidson, Hamilton, Knox, Montgomery, Rutherford, Shelby, and Williamson counties. Governing bodies would have to approve the option by a two-thirds majority vote.
- (viii) Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-15-104.
- (ix) Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-15-104(c)(2) and (3).
- (x) Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-6-601.
- (xi) If the registration deadline falls on a weekend or legal holiday, applications are accepted and processed the next business day. Voter registration deadlines for November elections may be impacted by the Columbus Day holiday in October. Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-2-109(b).
- (xii) Reports must include the event host and location, the number of days attended, and the source of funds used to attend the event.
- (xiii) The House sponsor initially argued that withholding pay would align the policy for administrators with that for commissioners, but after committee and floor debate highlighting the difference between the two roles (administrators are full-time positions whereas election commissioners are not), the provision was removed. Immediate family members are defined as a spouse, parent, sibling, or child.
- (xiv) Miller, Maurice. Shelby County Losing Two Judge Seats. WREG News Channel 3. (April 24, 2024). See <https://wreg.com/news/local/bill-eliminating-2-judges-seats-in-shelby-county-passes-tn-legislature/>.
- (xv) Tenn. Code Ann. § 8-44-102 defines Tennessee's open meetings policies, including that all meetings of any governing body (defined as two or more members) shall be open to the public except as provided by the state's constitution.
- (xvi) The Tennessee Constitution allows the legislature to close their doors when they think business should be kept secret (Article II § 21,22).
- (xvii) The legislation states that information will remain confidential until one of four things occur: 10 years has passed, the state has disbursed the relevant funds, the contract or event in question has concluded, or upon the expiration of the state's contract.
- (xviii) The bill defines eligible employees as teachers, principals, supervisors, or others required by law to hold a valid license of qualification for employment in the public schools of this state and who has been employed full time with a LEA or public charter school for at least 12 months.
- (xix) TACIR. (May 20, 2024). Research Plan: Child Care Businesses, Regulations, and Workers in Tennessee. See https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tacir/2023publications/2023_PassengerRail.pdf.
- (xx) TACIR. (June 2023). Back on Track? Intercity Passenger Rail Options for Tennessee. See https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tacir/2023publications/2023_PassengerRail.pdf.
- (xxi) Tenn. Code Ann. § 40-29-105.
- (xxii) Goins, Mark. (July 21, 2023). Memorandum: Restoration of Voting Rights. See <https://www.democracymatters.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/20230721-memo-restoration-of-voting-rights.pdf>.

(xxiii) Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-7-115(b).

(xxiv) Tenn. Code Ann. § 2-7-115(c).

(xxv) Tenn. Const. art. VII, § 5.

(xxvi) Defined as county-based elections such as county mayors, judges, assessors, and school boards.

(xxvii) Proposed amendments must pass both the House and Senate with a majority in one legislative session (which consists of two years) and then with two-thirds majority in both chambers again the following legislative session before being placed on the ballot for voters during the next gubernatorial election. Tenn. Const. art. IX, § 3.

(xxviii) HB 2842/SB 2504 (2022).

(xxix) Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury. (March 30, 2022). Weighted Caseload Reports From the Comptroller's Office (Memo). See <https://comptroller.tn.gov/content/dam/cot/orea/advanced-search/2022/JWCMemo2022.pdf>.

(xxx) The bill's sponsor said that District Attorneys are required to prosecute certain municipal cases (in certain jurisdictions) and municipalities are required to provide personnel, but that is not happening in some cases. The bill sought to allow DAs who could not shoulder the burden without such support to refuse the case.

(xxxi) State of Tennessee Public Chapter 1098 (2022). See <https://publications.tnsosfiles.com/acts/112/pub/pc1098.pdf>.

(xxxii) Tennessee Courts. (2018). Advisory Task Force on Composition of Judicial Districts. See <https://www.tncourts.gov/Advisory%20Task%20Force%20on%20Composition%20of%20Judicial%20Districts>.

(xxxiii) Hardship licenses are special restricted licenses issued to minors 14 or older who have demonstrated good cause for the license, i.e., getting to work. Tenn. Code Ann. § 50-50-312(f).

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