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RECEIVED
2026 AUG 13 AM 9:00
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August 5, 2026

Bureau of Ethics and Campaign Finance
Tennessee Ethics Commission
WRS Tennessee Tower, 2nd Floor
312 Rosa L. Parks Avenue
Nashville, TN 37243

Re: Updated Knox County Code of Ethics

To Whom It May Concern:

Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 8-17-104, please find enclosed for filing a certified copy of Resolution R-26-7-908 of the Knox County Commission updating the Knox County Code of Ethics. This Resolution was approved by the Knox County Commission at its regularly scheduled meeting on July 27, 2026.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

David L. Buuck
Knox County Law Director

DLB:jmr
Enclosure



SHERRY WITT
KNOX COUNTY CLERK
"Dedicated to Serving You"

RECEIVED
2026 AUG 13 AM 9:01
KNOX COUNTY CLERK

STATE OF TENNESSEE
COUNTY OF KNOX

I, Sherry Witt, Clerk of Knox County, Tennessee, do hereby certify that the attached is a true and correct copy of Resolution R-26-7-908 - Resolution of the Commission of Knox County, Tennessee, approving an update to the Knox County Code of Ethics.

This item was approved by the Knox County Board of Commissioners at their Regular Session meeting held on July 27, 2026.

The same shall appear of record in the Commission Library in the office of the Knox County Clerk.

Witness my hand at office in Knoxville, Tennessee, this 30th day of July 2026.



Sherry Witt
Knox County Clerk



RESOLUTION

**A RESOLUTION OF THE COMMISSION
OF KNOX COUNTY, TENNESSEE,
APPROVING AN UPDATE TO THE
KNOX COUNTY CODE OF ETHICS.**

RESOLUTION: R-26-7-908

REQUESTED BY: ETHICS COMMITTEE AND
COMMISSIONER FRAZIER

PREPARED BY: KNOX COUNTY LAW
DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

**APPROVED AS TO FORM
AND CORRECTNESS:** 
DIRECTOR OF LAW

APPROVED: July 27, 2026
DATE

VETOED: _____
DATE

**VETO
OVERRIDE:** _____
DATE

**MINUTE
BOOK** _____ **PAGE** _____

WHEREAS, the Knox County Commission (the "Commission") previously adopted and amended a Code of Ethics for Knox County, Tennessee (the "Code of Ethics") pursuant to the requirements of the Tennessee Comprehensive Governmental Ethics Reform Act of 2006 (T.C.A. § 8-17-101 et seq.) to guide the ethical conduct of elected officials, employees, and appointed representatives; and

WHEREAS, by means of Resolution R-25-8-903, the Commission requested that the Knox County Ethics Committee (the "Ethics Committee") undertake a comprehensive review and provide suggested revisions, if any, to the Code of Ethics, and provide any other related and relevant recommendations to the Commission for consideration; and

WHEREAS, a Subcommittee of the Ethics Committee met on several occasions for the purpose of a comprehensive review and revision of the Code of Ethics; and

WHEREAS, at its duly noticed public meeting on May 13, 2026, the full Ethics Committee approved the recommended amendments to the Code of Ethics to send to the Commission for consideration and approval.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMISSION OF KNOX COUNTY AS FOLLOWS:

The Knox County Commission hereby adopts and approves the updated Knox County Code of Ethics as presented this date, a copy of which is attached to this Resolution and incorporated herein by reference.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that if any notifications are to be made to effectuate this Resolution, then the County Clerk is hereby requested to forward a copy of this Resolution to the proper authority.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this Resolution is to take effect from and after its passage, as provided by the Charter of Knox County, Tennessee, the public welfare requiring it.

Gina Oster 7/27/26
Presiding Officer of the Commission Date

Sherry Witt 7/28/26
County Clerk Date

Approved: [Signature] 7/29/26
County Mayor Date

Vetoed: _____
County Mayor Date



KNOX COUNTY CODE OF ETHICS

Revised 07/27/2026

KNOX COUNTY ETHICS COMMITTEE

Voting Members

Deborah Stafford
Rusty Goddard
Carletta Rando-Smelcer
Steven Goodpaster
Krystal Gibson
Marcus Hilliard
Michael Bittel
Perrin Anderson
Gary Anders

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Introduction and Statement of Purpose

The citizens of Knox County are entitled to ethical, transparent, impartial, and accountable government. Official positions and government employment are public trusts that require officials, employees, appointees, and representatives of Knox County to conduct themselves with integrity, professionalism, fairness, and respect for the law and the citizenry.

This Knox County Ethics Code is adopted to promote public confidence in County government; to establish clear standards of ethical conduct; to provide guidance concerning conflicts of interest, misuse of office, gifts, confidential information, public resources, and other ethical matters; and to establish procedures for review and accountability consistent with Tennessee law and applicable County policies.

This Code applies, as provided herein, to elected officials, appointed officials, members of boards and commissions, County employees, department directors, constitutional officers and their personnel where applicable by law, volunteers acting in an official capacity, contractors when specifically incorporated by contract or policy, and other individuals serving or representing County government. The Code is intended to complement—not replace—existing obligations imposed by state law, County personnel policies, professional licensing requirements, civil service rules, criminal statutes, financial disclosure requirements, procurement regulations, auditing standards, and judicial or administrative procedures.

The ethics framework of Knox County government is shared among multiple offices, departments, and legal authorities, each serving distinct and important roles. Depending upon the nature of a matter, oversight, investigation, enforcement, discipline, or prosecution may involve the County Mayor's Office, County Commission, department leadership, the Human Resources Department, the Law Director's Office, internal auditors, the Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury, law enforcement agencies, state regulatory bodies, the District Attorney General, or the courts of competent jurisdiction. Certain matters may also implicate federal or state statutes governing fraud, official misconduct, open meetings, public records, procurement, campaign finance, discrimination, harassment, or criminal conduct.

The Ethics Committee established under this Code serves a limited and defined function within this broader structure. The Committee is not a criminal investigative agency, personnel tribunal, court of law, auditing body, or substitute for executive management. Except as expressly authorized by law or ordinance, the Committee does not prosecute crimes, impose criminal penalties, direct personnel actions, supersede department directors, invalidate contracts, conduct independent forensic audits, or serve as legal counsel to County officials or employees.

Rather, the Ethics Committee's primary role is to receive and review ethics complaints within its jurisdiction, following the established [Ethics Rules of Procedure](#); promote understanding of ethical standards; provide advisory guidance where authorized; evaluate whether alleged conduct may constitute a violation of this Ethics Code; and make findings, recommendations, referrals, or reports as permitted by ordinance and Tennessee law. When appropriate, matters may be referred to the Law Director's Office, Human Resources, Internal Audit, the Comptroller's Office, law enforcement, the District Attorney General, or other appropriate authorities for further review, investigation, administrative action, audit, or prosecution.

This Code shall be interpreted to encourage ethical decision-making, preserve public confidence in government, protect due process and fairness, ensure consistency with Tennessee law, and recognize the separate constitutional, statutory, and administrative authorities of County offices and officials. The provisions herein are intended not merely to prohibit misconduct, but to foster a culture of honesty, accountability, transparency, stewardship, and service throughout Knox County government.

Section 1. Definitions.

- 1) **"County"** means Knox County, which includes all boards, committees, commissions, authorities, corporations or other instrumentalities appointed or created by the county or an official of the county, the county election commission, the county health department, and utility districts in the county; however, the Knox County Board of Education and all Knox County Schools administrators, teachers, and other employees are specifically excluded.
- 2) **"Officials and employees"** means and includes any official, whether elected or appointed, officer, employee or servant, or any member of any board, agency, commission, authority or corporation (whether compensated or not), or any officer, employee or servant thereof, of the county.
- 3) **"Personal interest"** means, for the purpose of disclosure of personal interests in accordance with this Code of Ethics, a financial interest of the official or employee, or a financial interest of the official's or employee's spouse or child living in the same household, in the matter to be voted upon, regulated, supervised, or otherwise acted upon in an official capacity.
- 4) **"Ethical Standards"** includes rules and regulations regarding limits on, and/or reasonable and systematic disclosure of, gifts or other things of value received by officials and employees that impact or appear to impact their discretion and includes rules and regulations regarding reasonable and systematic disclosure by officials and employees of their personal interests that impact or appear to impact their discretion. The term "ethical standards" does not include personnel or employment policies or policies or procedures related to operational aspects of governmental entities
- 5) **"Relative"** means spouse, parent, grandparent, sibling, child, grandchild, or equivalent "step", "foster", or "in-law" or other related person that resides in the same household. A legal guardian or individual acting as a parent substitute is also included in this definition.
- 6) **"Complainant"** means the individual (or individuals) who makes a formal written complaint alleging that another person has violated the ethics code.
- 7) **"Respondent"** means the individual (or individuals) against whom the complaint is made — that is, the person(s) alleged to have violated the ethics code.

Section 2. Disclosure of personal interest in voting matters.

An elected official or employee of Knox County with responsibility to vote on a measure shall disclose during the meeting at which the vote takes place, before any discussion or vote on the measure, and so it appears in the Minutes, any personal interest that affects or that would lead a reasonable person to infer that it affects the official's vote on the measure. In addition, said elected official or employee shall recuse him/herself from the discussion and/or vote on the matter. This provision shall not be applicable to voting on measures for reapportionment of districts or other measures that affect all members of the Knox County Commission. Disclosures must be filed annually with the Ethics Committee or county clerk, even if no conflicts arise, to promote proactive transparency.

Section 3. Disclosure of personal interest in non-voting matters.

An official or employee who must exercise discretion relative to any matter other than casting a vote and who has a personal interest in the matter that affects or that would lead a reasonable person to infer that it affects the exercise of the discretion shall disclose, before the exercise of the discretion when possible, the interest on the attached disclosure form and file the disclosure form with the county clerk. In addition, the official or employee may, to the extent allowed by law, recuse himself or herself from the exercise of discretion in the matter. Procedures for conflicts are clarified to require immediate notification to a supervisor or the Ethics Committee, with documentation retained for audit purposes ([Please see Attachment A of this document for the disclosure form](#)).

Section 4. Acceptance of gifts and other things of value.

4.1 Solicitation or Acceptance of Gifts

No official or county employee, or candidate for nomination or election shall solicit, or offer, or accept "anything of value," including a gift, loan, reward, promise of future employment, favor, or service, flights, political contributions exceeding state limits and campaign-related benefits, in line with enhanced transparency standards, based upon any understanding that the vote, official action, or judgment of the public officer, employee, or candidate would be influenced thereby.

Further, no employee or public official shall solicit or accept, directly or indirectly, on behalf of himself or herself or any member of the employee's household any gift, including but not limited to any gratuity, service, favor, food, entertainment, lodging, transportation, flights, or any other thing of monetary value from any person or entity that:

- 1) Has or is seeking to obtain, contractual or other business or financial relations with Knox County;
- 2) Conducts operations or activities that are regulated by Knox County; or
- 3) Has interests that may be substantially affected by the performance or non-performance of the person's official duties.

4.2 Acceptable Items

It shall not be a violation of this policy for an official or employee to receive entertainment, food, refreshments, meals, health screenings, amenities, foodstuffs, or beverages that are provided in connection with a conference sponsored by an established or recognized statewide, regional, national, professional or employee association or organization of government officials or employees or by an umbrella or affiliate organization of said associations or organizations.

It shall not be a violation of this policy for an official or employee to receive entertainment, food, refreshments, meals, health screenings, amenities, foodstuffs, or beverages that are provided in connection with a charitable event sponsored by an established charitable organization or an event to benefit a charitable organization.

The following do not constitute "anything of value":

- 1) Payment by a governmental entity of salaries, compensation, employee benefits or authorized reimbursement of actual and necessary expenses;
- 2) Campaign or political contributions that are received and reported in accordance with state law (enhanced to prohibit contributions that could influence official actions);

- 3) Non-cash awards of nominal or trifling value publicly presented in recognition of public service;
- 4) Gifts or other tokens of recognition presented by representatives of governmental entities or political subdivisions acting in their official capacities;
- 5) Anything of value, regardless of value, when the item is offered to a governmental entity is accepted on behalf of the governmental entity and is to remain the property of the governmental entity;
- 6) A gift given by a member of the public official or employee's immediate family, or by an individual if the gift is given for a non-business purpose and is motivated by a close personal friendship and not by the position of the employee or public official. In determining whether a gift falls within this subsection, the factors contained in TCA section 3-6-114(b) (3) (A) and (B) shall apply;
- 7) Gifts received as a bequest or inheritance;
- 8) Loans made in the ordinary course of a lender's business with prevailing rates and terms and which do not discriminate directly or indirectly against or in favor of an elected official or county employee because of such individual's status;
- 9) Fees, expenses or income including those resulting from outside employment which are permitted and reported in accordance with state law;
- 10) Payment by an employer or business other than a government entity of salaries, compensation, employee benefits, or authorized reimbursement of actual and necessary expenses when the payment is unrelated to a member's status as a public official or employee and is not made for the purpose of influencing, directly or indirectly, the vote, official action or decision of an elected official;
- 11) Unsolicited advertising material of nominal value;
- 12) Food and refreshments of nominal value when they are part of the elected official or employee's participation in a charitable, civic, political or community event, which bears a relationship to the official or employee's office and the official or employee is attending in an official capacity;
- 13) Food, refreshments, foodstuffs, entertainment and beverages provided as part of a meal or other event if the value of such items does not exceed seventy-five dollars (\$75) per occasion, with a limit of two (2) meals per day, not to surpass 60 days total within one fiscal year;
- 14) Entrance fees, admission fees, or tickets shall be valued on the face value of the ticket or fee, or on a daily or per event basis, whichever is greater; or
- 15) Informational materials in the form of books, articles periodicals, other written materials, audio and videotapes or other forms of communication.

- 16) Entrance fees, food, refreshments, amenities, beverages and other gifts given to all participants in a charitable event sponsored by an established charitable organization or an event to benefit a charitable organization.

4.3 Salary and expenses

No public officer shall be prohibited from voting on a matter affecting his or her salary, expenses, or other compensation as a public officer as provided by law.

4.4 Misuse of public position

No public officer or county employee shall corruptly use or attempt to use his or her official position or any property or resource which may be within his or her trust, or perform his or her official duties, to secure a special privilege, benefit, or exemption for himself, herself, or others.

4.5 Disclosure or use of certain information

No public officer or county employee shall disclose or use information not available to members of the general public and gained by reason of his or her official position for his or her personal gain or benefit or for the personal gain or benefit of any other person or business entity.

4.6 Lobbying by Former Local Officials – Prohibition

A person who has been elected to any county office may not personally represent another person or entity for compensation before the governing body of which the person was an officer for a period of one year after vacating that office.

4.7 Use of Government Property

No public official or employee shall make use of the facilities, equipment, vehicles, personnel, or supplies of the county or its agencies for private use or gain except to the extent that the use is lawfully available to the general public.

4.8 Acknowledgement

All elected officials and employees of Knox County must sign an employee acknowledgement stating they have received a copy of the Knox County Code of Ethics, that they have either read the code or have had it read to them, and that they agree to abide by the terms as a condition of their employment.

Further, every elected official and employee shall attend or view an ethics in government program within six (6) months of his or her employment, or assuming office, with Knox County. The training is to be provided by County Technical Assistance Service (CTAS) or other qualified agency or by the Knox County Department of Human Resources. Training shall be annual and include modules on emerging issues like data ethics and social media.

Section 5. Nepotism.

No elected or appointed official or employee of Knox County shall advocate, recommend, supervise, manage, or cause the employment, appointment, promotion, transfer, or advancement of his or her relative to an office or position of employment within the Knox County Government.

Section 6. Whistleblower Protection.

- 1) Officials and employees are encouraged to report ethical violations via sworn complaint to the Ethics Committee pursuant to the Rules of Procedure.
- 2) No Official employee shall use or threaten to use any official authority or influence to discourage, restrain or interfere with any other person for the purpose of preventing such person from acting in good faith to report or otherwise bring to the attention of the Ethics Committee facts relating to an ethics violation.
- 3) No Official or employee shall use or threaten to use any official authority or influence to effect any action to retaliate against any other Official or employee who reports, initiates a complaint, or otherwise brings to the attention of the Ethics Committee information relating to an Ethics Committee investigation or an ethics violation.
- 4) Violations of this section may subject the offending person(s) to any and/or all of the penalties outlined in this policy.

Section 7. Theft, Misappropriation or Mismanagement of County Funds

7.1 Duty

All Knox County officials and employees have a professional, legal, ethical, and fiduciary duty to protect those public monies entrusted to them specifically and to Knox County Government in general.

7.2 Zero Tolerance

Knox County has a "zero-tolerance" policy regarding the theft, misappropriation, and/or mismanagement of funds entrusted to its employees.

7.3 Public Money

Knox County officials and employees who steal, misappropriate, and/or mismanage funds or who aid and/or abet others to do so will be subject to criminal prosecution and/or dismissal from their employment with Knox County.

7.4 Failure to Report

Those County officials and employees who fail to report those employees who steal, misappropriate, and/or mismanage funds shall be subject to criminal prosecution and/or dismissal from their employment with Knox County.

7.5 Fraud Hotline

Theft, misappropriation, and mismanagement of county funds are to be reported to the Knox County Fraud Hotline as provided under state law and are criminal offenses and shall not be under the jurisdiction of the Ethics Committee. For more information on the fraud hotline, please visit our website: <https://knoxcounty.org/audit/hotline.php> or call 865-215-2892.

Section 8. Ethics Committee.

There shall be a Knox County Ethics Committee (the "Ethics Committee") consisting of nine (9) citizen members. The Ethics Committee constitution, qualifications of members, terms of office, organization, and other requirements shall be as follows:

- 1) Members shall be citizens of Knox County and also registered to vote in Knox County.
- 2) Members shall not be employees or elected officials of Knox County. In the event a member of the Ethics Committee submits a Candidate Nominating Petition to the Knox County Election Commission to be a candidate for an elected office in Knox County, then that member shall immediately resign as a member of the Ethics Committee.
- 3) Members shall not be a relative to any elected official of Knox County.
- 4) One (1) citizen member shall be appointed by the Knox County Sheriff, which appointment shall be spread of record on the minutes of a Knox County Commission meeting.
- 5) Three (3) citizen members shall be appointed by the Knox County Mayor, which appointments shall be spread of record on the minutes of a Knox County Commission meeting.
- 6) Five (5) citizen members shall be appointed by the Knox County Commission.
- 7) Non-Voting Liaisons:
 - a. The Knox County Mayor shall appoint one (1) employee.
 - b. The Knox County Sheriff shall appoint one (1) employee.
 - c. Knox County Commission shall appoint one (1) commissioner.
- 8) Members of the Ethics Committee shall serve staggered four (4) year terms. Members shall be permitted to serve only one (1) full four (4) year term regardless of who appoints the member. However, if no qualified person is interested in filling a vacancy, then a member shall be permitted to serve a second four (4) year term on the Ethics Committee. If a person is appointed to serve an unexpired term, this partial service shall not be considered a term.
- 9) Any vacancy occurring on the Ethics Committee for an unexpired term shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment.
- 10) Notice of all vacancies on the Ethics Committee shall be published in a newspaper of general circulation and posted online to the Knox County Ethics Committee website and the Knox County Commission website.

- 11) All Ethics Committee members shall view the ethics training video available on the Knox County website prior to his/her first official Ethics meeting. New members shall verbally acknowledge in the record at their first Ethics meeting that they have completed viewing the training video.
- 12) The Ethics Committee shall convene as soon as practicable after November 1 of each year and elect a chair and vice-chair.
- 13) The minutes and other records of the Ethics Committee shall be maintained by the county clerk and shall be filed in the office of the county clerk, where they shall be open to public inspection.
- 14) This Code shall be reviewed every five (5) years by the Ethics Committee, with public input solicited.
- 15) All Ethics Committee members will take part in training annually at the reorganization meeting or view the training within 30 days after the reorganization meeting.

Section 9. Ethics Complaints.

Questions and complaints regarding conflicts of interest shall be directed to the Knox County Law Director. Complaints shall be in writing, sworn to under oath in the presence of a notary public and signed by the person making the complaint, and shall set forth the provisions of this ethics code alleged to be violated, and a reasonable detail of the facts personally known by the complainant upon which the complaint is based. Hearsay allegations are not considered to be facts supporting a complaint.

Initially, the Knox County Law Director shall determine if the complaint meets these requirements and shall submit that determination to the Chair of the Ethics Committee within 10 days of receipt of the complaint. The Knox County Law Director may investigate any credible complaint against an official or employee charged with a violation of the Code of Ethics. The Ethics Committee shall refer any submission it receives to the formal complaint process. If a member of the Committee is involved in the facts of a complaint, such member shall recuse himself or herself from all proceedings involving such complaint.

(Please see the formal complaint process found here: <https://knoxcounty.org/ethics/swornComplaintForm.php>).

If the Ethics Committee convenes a hearing pursuant to the Rules of Procedure, the Ethics Committee is charged to determine as follows, and nothing more:

- 1) Did the Respondent or the Respondent's relative have a financial interest in the matter to be voted upon, regulated, supervised, or otherwise acted upon in an official capacity?
- 2) Did the Respondent corruptly use or attempt to use his or her official position or employment, or any property or resource which may be within his or her trust, or perform his or her duties, to secure a special privilege, benefit, or exemption for himself, herself, or others?
- 3) Did the Respondent disclose or use information not available to members of the general public and gained by reason of his or her official position for his or her personal gain or benefit or for the personal gain or benefit of any other person or business entity?
- 4) Did the Respondent, on behalf of him/herself or any relative, solicit or accept, directly or indirectly, "anything of value", not otherwise allowed, based upon an understanding that a vote or official action would be unduly influenced?

Upon final deliberation, the Committee may:

- 1) refer the matter to the Knox County Law Director for a legal opinion and/or recommendations for action;
- 2) in the case of an official, refer the matter to the Knox County Commission for such action as they deem appropriate.
- 3) in the case of an employee, refer the matter to the official responsible for supervision of the employee for possible disciplinary action if the official finds discipline warranted;
- 4) in a case involving possible violation of state statutes, refer the matter to the district attorney;
- 5) take no action and dismiss the complaint as provided in the Rules of Procedure.

The interpretation that a reasonable person in the circumstances would apply shall be used in interpreting and enforcing this Code of Ethics.

When a violation of the Code of Ethics constitutes a violation of a personnel policy or a civil service policy, or criminal act, the violation shall be dealt with as a violation of the personnel or civil service provisions or criminal violation rather than as a violation of this Code of Ethics and shall be reported to the appropriate department or legal authority.

Section 10. Applicable State Laws

In addition to the ethical principles set out in this Code of Ethics, state laws also provide a framework for the ethical behavior of county officials and employees in the performance of their duties. Officials and employees should familiarize themselves with the state laws applicable to their office or position and the performance of their duties. To the extent that an issue is addressed by state law made applicable to counties, the provisions of that state law, to the extent they are more restrictive, shall control.

Attachment A: Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form

Instructions:

Officials and employees are required to disclose personal interests and nepotism in matters that affect, or would lead a reasonable person to infer that it would affect, the exercise of discretion by an official or employee. This form is for reporting personal interests and nepotism required to be disclosed under Section 3 of the Knox County Code of Ethics. Once complete, this form shall be submitted to the Chair of the Knox County Ethics Committee and will be read into the record of the subsequent meeting of the Knox County Ethics Committee, or submitted to the Knox County Clerk.

Date of disclosure: _____

Name of official or employee: _____

Office and position: _____

Description of personal interest (describe below in detail):

Signature of official or employee