

Research Plan: Public Chapter 967, Acts of 2026, Crime Stoppers

Research Director: Michael Mount

Project Lead: Cameron Fox

Support:

Deputy Executive Director Approval: Initial: *MMB* Date: June 1, 2026

Executive Director Approval: Initial: *CML* Date: June 1, 2026

Purpose

To study anonymous tip line programs and crime reporting in Tennessee, including how to enhance their effectiveness.

Background

Crime Stoppers is a community program that allows people to anonymously report crimes to law enforcement without fear of retaliation and to claim cash rewards. An Albuquerque detective started Crime Stoppers in 1976 to encourage citizens to come forward with information about a murder, leading to three arrests within days of the first calls. The Crime Stoppers model was then replicated across the United States throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Crime Stoppers USA reports that, to date, 782,932 arrests have been made in the United States since the program's inception. There have been 1,161,118 cases cleared, and \$4,148,814,967 in stolen drugs and cash property recovered. There are also student Crime Stoppers programs that exist in approximately 2,000 middle schools, high schools, and community colleges across the nation to combat crimes such as vandalism, theft, bullying, and drug or weapon possession. According to the executive director of the East Tennessee Valley Crime Stoppers (ETVCS) program, amounts paid for tips range from a few hundred dollars to \$1,000 or more in some cases. Under the Bank Secrecy Act of 1970, if tip rewards total \$10,000 or more in one transaction, financial institutions are required to file currency transaction reports (CTR)s with the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN).

In Tennessee, there are 11 active Crime Stoppers programs, though others that used to operate have been dissolved. These programs are located in Chattanooga, Clarksville, Crossville, Denmark, Fayetteville, Hendersonville, the Knoxville region (covering 12 counties in East Tennessee), Memphis and Shelby County, Murfreesboro, Nashville, and Union City. Not every part of Tennessee has a Crime Stoppers program. Although tips can be received from any part of the state, no rewards are paid in parts of the state without a designated Crime Stoppers program. The programs are organized as non-profits and are funded primarily through donations. Volunteers take calls and parter with law enforcement and the media, along with online submission portals and some programs having their own downloadable tip line apps. Boards of directors set policy and reward amounts. On a statewide level, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation has its own anonymous tip line and online submission form like Crime Stoppers, except that it does not require anonymity as a reporting criterion.

While Crime Stoppers ensures anonymity, anonymous reporting or not, the perceived risk of retaliation can sometimes prompt people who want to come forward to withhold information out of fear. For example, perceptions of retaliation risk left citizens of Baltimore with the impression that norms surrounding communication with law enforcement were weaker than they actually were, according to a 2020 case study evaluating police-citizen cooperation in crime reporting.

Some states have laws that do not allow investigators to break anonymity of reporters, but Tennessee currently does not. For example, Texas and Florida have protections in place shielding tipsters from retaliation and limiting the disclosure of potentially sensitive information. Additionally, both states have programs at the state level that oversee all Crime Stoppers programs in their states. In Tennessee, Silver Alert—a program created to locate missing citizens who have wandered due to dementia, physical impairment, or disability—also relies on citizen reports. A key difference, though, is that Silver Alert operates under Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI)’s oversight and is state funded, while Crime Stoppers operates without state oversight or funding.

The executive director of ETVCS said law enforcement agencies do not always provide data to Crime Stoppers. She said Crime Stoppers programs rely on donations for funding, which isn’t always enough to increase tip reward amounts, hire staff to process tips, or increase program coverage in the state. Additionally, she said, unlike some other states, Tennessee does not have legal protections in place for tipsters to remain anonymous if government officials or legal counsel request their identification. In response to these concerns, Public Chapter 967, Acts of 2026, sponsored by Senator Massey and Representative Carringer, requests that TACIR study the status of the crime

stoppers programs across the state and make recommendations to enhance such programs. The study shall include, but not be limited to:

- (1) Assessment of the data collection and reporting capabilities of each crime stoppers program, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the data and reporting;
- (2) Assessment of the funding streams and stability of the funding available, while assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the crime stoppers programs to fundraise; and
- (3) Assessment of the partnership between each crime stoppers organization, the law enforcement agencies in the community, and the community at large.

In addition, the Act requires TACIR to make recommendations of methods to improve outcomes for crime stoppers programs, including:

- (1) Increased statewide coordination, accountability, and program capacity;
- (2) Greater public engagement and higher tip volume;
- (3) Enhanced effectiveness and cost efficiency in law enforcement efforts;
- (4) Stronger trust and collaboration between communities and law enforcement;
- (5) Consistent program standards and best practices across the state; and
- (6) Establishing a statewide framework for support and accountability for crime stoppers programs.

Define the Problem

Anonymous tip lines can encourage individuals to come forward with information on crimes they would not otherwise share with police, but some crimes may still go unreported.

Assemble Some Evidence

- Review Public Chapter 967, Acts of 2026, to determine what it asks the commission to study.
 - Interview the sponsor of the legislation and any other members of the General Assembly who have an interest in the bill.
 - Review committee hearings on the bill.
 - Interview other stakeholders to determine what is driving this issue.
 - ♦ Crime Stopper programs in Tennessee and other states

- ♦ Crime Stoppers USA
- ♦ Southeastern Crime Stoppers Association
- ♦ Law enforcement agencies
 - County sheriff departments
 - City police departments
 - State troopers
 - Tennessee Bureau of Investigation
- ♦ Tennessee Sheriffs' Association
- ♦ Tennessee Fraternal Order of Police
- ♦ Anti-crime organizations
- ♦ Legal advocates for accused persons
- ♦ Legal groups
 - Tennessee District Attorneys General Conference (TNDAGC)
- ♦ Victim's rights organizations
- ♦ Local government organizations
 - Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS)
 - County Technical Assistance Service (CTAS)
 - County Services Association (CSA)
- Review existing programs in Tennessee, designed to address this issue, and interview stakeholders involved with such programs.
- Review relevant federal and state statutes and regulations.
- Review similar laws, regulations, and programs in other states.
- Review relevant literature.
- Gather relevant data sets, including statistics related to the number of Crime Stoppers programs in Tennessee and nationally, lists of active and inactive Crime Stoppers programs in Tennessee

Proposed Research Timeline

- Problem statement and research plan (May 2026)
- Research
 - Assemble evidence (May-December 2026)
 - Construct alternatives and select criteria (January 2027)
 - Project outcomes, confront trade-offs, and select draft recommendations (January-February 2027)
- Storyboard, outline, and write the report (February-March 2027)
- Draft report to the commission for comments (Spring 2027 commission meeting)
- Final report to commission for approval (Summer 2027 commission meeting)



State of Tennessee

PUBLIC CHAPTER NO. 967

SENATE BILL NO. 1492

By Massey, Campbell

Substituted for: House Bill No. 1924

By Carringer, Clemmons, Pearson

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 38; Title 39 and Title 40, relative to crime stoppers programs.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. The Tennessee advisory commission on intergovernmental relations (TACIR) shall study the status of the crime stoppers programs across the state and make recommendations to enhance such programs. The assessment must include, but not be limited to:

- (1) Assessment of the data collection and reporting capabilities of each crime stoppers program, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the data and reporting;
- (2) Assessment of the funding streams and stability of the funding available, while assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the crime stoppers programs to fundraise; and
- (3) Assessment of the partnership between each crime stoppers organization, the law enforcement agencies in the community, and the community at large.

SECTION 2. TACIR shall make recommendations of methods to improve outcomes for crime stoppers programs, including:

- (1) Increased statewide coordination, accountability, and program capacity;
- (2) Greater public engagement and higher tip volume;
- (3) Enhanced effectiveness and cost efficiency in law enforcement efforts;
- (4) Stronger trust and collaboration between communities and law enforcement;
- (5) Consistent program standards and best practices across the state; and
- (6) Establishing a statewide framework for support and accountability for crime stoppers programs.

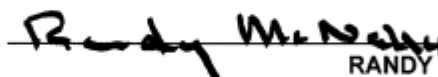
SECTION 3. TACIR may request information and input from other appropriate state and local governmental entities, as necessary, and such entities shall comply with TACIR's request. The study must be conducted from TACIR's existing resources.

SECTION 4. Upon completion of the study required by Sections 1 and 2, TACIR shall report its findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the chair of the judiciary committee of the senate and the chair of the committee of the house of representatives having jurisdiction over subject matters pertaining to criminal justice, and provide a copy of the report to the legislative librarian. The report may be delivered electronically.

SECTION 5. This act takes effect July 1, 2026, the public welfare requiring it.

SENATE BILL NO. 1492

PASSED: April 20, 2026


RANDY McNALLY
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE


CAMERON SEXTON, SPEAKER
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APPROVED this 13th day of May 2026


BILL LEE, GOVERNOR