

# KNOX COUNTY, TENNESSEE CODE OF ETHICS

## **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.

**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. "Personal Interest" means, for the purpose of disclosure of personal interest in accordance with this policy, 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.

**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.

**Section 4. Acceptance of gifts and other things of value.** It shall not be considered 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.

**Solicitation or acceptance of gifts.** No public officer, county employee, or candidate for nomination or election shall solicit or accept “anything of value,” including a gift, loan, reward, promise of future employment, favor, or service, 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, or any other thing of monetary value from any person or entity that:

- has or is seeking to obtain, contractual or other business or financial relations with Knox County;
- conducts operations or activities that are regulated by Knox County; or
- has interests that may be substantially affected by the performance or non- performance of the person’s official duties.

For the purposes of this section, the following do not constitute “anything of value”:

- Payment by a governmental entity of salaries, compensation, employee benefits or authorized reimbursement of actual and necessary expenses;
- Campaign or political contributions that are received and reported in accordance with state law;
- Non-cash awards of nominal or trifling value publicly presented in recognition of public service;
- Gifts or other tokens of recognition presented by representatives of governmental entities or political subdivisions acting in their official capacities;
- 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;
- 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;
- Gifts received as a bequest or inheritance;
- 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;
- Fees, expenses or income including those resulting from outside employment which are permitted and reported in accordance with state law;

- 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;
- Unsolicited advertising material of nominal value;
- 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;
- Food, refreshments, foodstuffs, entertainment and beverages provided as part of a meal or other event if the value of such items does not exceed thirty-five dollars (\$35) per occasion, with a limit of two (2) meals per day;
- 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
- Informational materials in the form of books, articles periodicals, other written materials, audio and videotapes or other forms of communication.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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 (1) year after vacating that office.

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

**Process.** All elected officials and employees of Knox County within thirty (30) days of these addendums going into effect must sign an employee acknowledgement stating they have received a copy of the policy, that they have either read the policy or have had it read to them, and that they agree to abide by the terms as a condition of their employment. In addition, prior to their employment, all new employees must sign the statement and agree to abide by its terms. Each employee will be given a copy of their signed statement. The original will be placed in the

employee's official personnel file maintained by the respective department of Human Resources, by the constitutional officer, or authorized records custodian. Further, every elected official and employee shall attend an ethics in government program within six months of his or her employment with Knox County. Current officials and employees shall complete training within ninety (90) days. The training is to be provided by CTAS or other qualified agency or by the Knox County Department of Human Resources.

**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.

For the purposes of this policy, "relative" means parent, step-parent, foster parent, parent-in-law, child, step-child, spouse, brother, brother-in-law, foster brother, step-brother, sister, sister-in-law, foster sister, grandparent, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, grandchild or other person that resides in the same household. A court-appointed legal guardian or an individual who is acted as a parent substitute is also included within this definition.

**Section 6. Whistleblower Protection.**

(a) Elected officials, employees and appointees are encouraged to report suspected ethical violations to the Ethics Committee.

(b) No Official, Employee or Appointee 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 information relating to an ethics violation or investigation.

(c) No Official, Employee or Appointee shall use or threaten to use any official authority or influence to effect any action to retaliate against an Official, Employee or Appointee 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.

(d) Violations of this section may subject the offending person(s) to any and/or all of the penalties outlined in Section 7 of this Policy.

**Section 7. Theft, Misappropriation or Mismanagement of County Funds**

(a) All Knox County 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.

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

(c) Knox County 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.

(d) Those County 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.

**Section 8. Ethics Complaints.** A Knox County Ethics Committee (the “Ethics Committee”) consisting of nine (9) members shall be appointed to staggered three (3) year terms as follows:

1. One (1) member of the Knox County Commission, appointed by the Knox County Commission. In the event the Knox County Commissioner serving on the Ethics Committee is no longer serving on the Knox County Commission, said Knox County Commissioner shall vacate his/her seat on the Ethics Committee.

2. One (1) employee of the Knox County Sheriff’s Office, appointed by the Knox County Sheriff, or the Knox County Sheriff.

3. Seven (7) citizens of Knox County who meet the residential requirements of being a Knox County voter, who are not employees of Knox County, and are not directly related (i.e., spouse, sibling, parent or child) to any elected official of Knox County. Three (3) such citizens shall be appointed by the Knox County Commission, two (2) such citizens shall be appointed by the Knox County Mayor and two (2) such citizens shall be appointed by the Knox County Ethics Committee following an open process allowing citizens seeking appointment to submit letters, resumes and other relevant information to the Knox County Ethics Committee over a two (2) week period.

Terms of office shall be for three (3) years, with initial appointments after September 1, 2008 as follows:

One (1) year term: One member appointed by the Knox County Sheriff and two citizen members appointed by the Knox County Ethics Committee.

Two (2) year term: Two citizen members appointed by the Knox County Commission and one citizen member appointed by the Knox County Mayor.

Three (3) year term: One commissioner member appointed by the Knox County Commission, one citizen member appointed by the Knox County Commission and one citizen member appointed by the Knox County Mayor.

The Ethics Committee shall convene as soon as practicable after their appointment and elect a chair and secretary. The records of the Ethics Committee shall be maintained by the secretary and shall be filed in the office of the county clerk, where they shall be open to public inspection.

All Ethics Committee members are strongly encouraged to participate in the “Ethics in Government” training held by the County Technical Assistance Service or other certified ethics training within 90 days of his/her appointment.

Questions and complaints regarding violations of this Code of Ethics or of any violation of state law governing ethical conduct should be directed to the chair of the Ethics Committee. 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 in reasonable detail the facts upon which the complaint is based.

The County Ethics Committee shall investigate any credible complaint against an official or employee charging any violation of this Code of Ethics, or may undertake an investigation on its own initiative when it acquires information indicating a possible violation, and make recommendations for action to end or seek retribution for any activity that, in the Committee's judgment, constitutes a violation of this Code of Ethics. If a member of the Committee is the subject of a complaint, such member shall recuse himself or herself from all proceedings involving such complaint.

The Committee may:

- (1) refer the matter to the County Attorney for a legal opinion and/or recommendations for action;
- (2) in the case of an official, refer the matter to the county legislative body for possible public censure if the county legislative body finds such action warranted;
- (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 for possible ouster or criminal prosecution;

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 this Code of Ethics also constitutes a violation of a personnel policy or a civil service policy, the violation shall be dealt with as a violation of the personnel or civil service provisions rather than as a violation of this Code of Ethics.

**Section 9. 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 (law of general application, public law of local application, local option law, or private act), the provisions of that state law, to the extent they are more restrictive, shall control. Following is a brief summary of selected state laws concerning ethics in county government. For the full text of these statutes, see the Tennessee Code Annotated (T.C.A.) sections indicated.

Campaign finance—T.C.A. Title 2, Chapter 10. Part One (campaign financial disclosure) requires candidates for public office to disclose contributions and contributors to their campaigns. Part Three (campaign contribution limits) limits the total amount of campaign contributions a candidate may receive from an individual and sets limits on the amount a candidate may receive in cash.

Conflict of interest—T.C.A. § 12-4-101 is the general conflict of interest statute that applies in all counties. It prohibits anyone who votes for, lets out, or in any manner supervises any work or contract from having a direct financial interest in that contract, purchase or work, and it requires disclosure of indirect financial interests by public acknowledgment.

Conflict of interest—T.C.A. § 49-6-2003 applies to the department of education in all counties and prohibits direct and indirect conflicts of interest in the sale of supplies for use in public schools.

Conflict of interest—T.C.A. § 5-1-125 applies in all counties and prohibits county officials and employees from purchasing surplus county property except where it is sold by public bid.

Conflict of interest—T.C.A. § 54-7-203 applies in all counties that are governed by the County Uniform Highway Law. It prohibits officials and employees in the highway department and members of the county legislative body from having any personal interest in purchases of supplies, materials, machinery, and equipment for the highway department.

Conflict of interest—T.C.A. § 5-14-114 applies in counties that have adopted the County Purchasing Law of 1957. It prohibits the purchasing agent, members of the purchasing commission, and all county officials from having any financial or other personal beneficial interest in any contract or purchase of goods or services for any department or agency of the county.

Conflict of interest—T.C.A. § 5-21-121 applies in counties that have adopted the County Financial Management System of 1981. It prohibits all county officials and employees from having any financial or other personal beneficial interest in the purchase of any supplies, materials or equipment for the county.

Conflict of interest—T.C.A. §§ 5-5-102 and 12-4-101 govern disclosures and abstentions from voting due to conflicts of interest of members of county legislative bodies.

Conflict of interest disclosure statements—T.C.A. § 8-50-501 and the following sections require candidates and appointees to local public offices to file a disclosure statement with the state ethics commission listing major sources of income, investments, lobbying activities, professional services provided, bankruptcies, certain loans, and other information, and to keep these statements up to date.

Gifts—T.C.A. § 5-14-114 applies in counties that have adopted the County Purchasing Law of 1957. It prohibits the purchasing agent, members of the purchasing commission, and all county officials from receiving anything of value, directly or indirectly, from anyone who may have or obtain a contract or purchase order with the county.

Gifts—T.C.A. § 5-21-121 applies in counties that have adopted the County Financial Management System of 1981. It prohibits the finance director, purchasing agent, and employees in those departments from accepting anything of value, directly or indirectly, from anyone who furnishes supplies, materials or equipment to the county.

Honoraria—T.C.A. § 2-10-116 prohibits elected officials from accepting an honorarium (including money or anything of value, but not including reimbursement for actual expenses) for an appearance, speech, or article in their official capacity.

Private use of public property—T.C.A. § 54-7-202 applies in counties that are governed by the County Uniform Highway Law. It prohibits the private use of equipment, rock, and other highway materials.

Court sales—T.C.A. § 39-16-405 prohibits judges, clerks of court, court officers, and employees of court, from bidding on or purchasing any property sold through the court for which such person discharges official duties.

Rules of the Supreme Court—Rule 10, Cannon 5 (Code of Judicial Conduct) establishes ethical rules for judges and other court personnel when exercising judicial functions.

Fee statutes—T.C.A. §§ 8-21-101, 8-21-102, and 8-21-103 set out circumstances where fees are authorized, prohibit officials from requiring payment of fees in advance of performance of services except where specifically authorized, and set penalties for charging excessive or unauthorized fees.

Consulting fee prohibition for elected county officials—T.C.A. §§ 2-10-122 and 2-10-124 prohibit officials from receiving compensation for advising or assisting a person or entity in influencing county legislative or administrative action.

Crimes involving public officials—T.C.A. § 39-16-101 and the following sections prohibit bribery, soliciting unlawful compensation, and buying and selling in regard to offices.

Official misconduct—T.C.A. § 39-16-402 applies to public servants and candidates for office and prohibits unauthorized exercise of official power, acting in an official capacity exceeding the servant's power, refusal to perform a duty imposed by law, violating a law relating to the servant's office or employment, and receiving a benefit not provided by law.

Official oppression—T.C.A. § 39-16-403 prohibits abuse of power by a public servant.

Bribery for votes—T.C.A. §§ 2-19-121, 2-19-126, and 2-19-127 prohibit bribery of voters in elections.

Misuse of official information—T.C.A. § 39-16-404 prohibits a public servant from attaining a benefit or aiding another person in attaining a benefit from information which was obtained in an official capacity and is not available to the public.

Ouster law—T.C.A. § 8-47-101 sets out conduct that is punishable by ouster from office, including misconduct in office and neglect of duty.

**KNOX COUNTY CODE OF ETHICS**  
**CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

Instructions: This form is for reporting personal interests required to be disclosed under Section 3 of the Code of Ethics of this county. Officials and employees are required to disclose personal interests in matters that affect or would lead a reasonable person to infer that it would affect the exercise of discretion of an official or employee.

1. Date of disclosure: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Name of official or employee: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Office and position: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Description of personal interest (describe below in detail):

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of official or employee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of witness