



COUNTY NEWS

TCSA Hosts First Full County Government Day in Three Years

Nearly 300 individuals gathered for the annual conference in Nashville

From Monday, February 28 to Tuesday, March 1, 2022, the Tennessee County Services Association hosted its first full in-person County Government Day since 2019. In 2021, this event took a hiatus due to the status of the COVID-19 pandemic. While TCSA did hold County Government Day in 2020, the event had to be cut short due to the impacts of the middle Tennessee tornadoes.

After past years' unpredictable events, TCSA was even more glad to provide the full County Government Day again for its members. This year's conference was full of committee meetings,



programs and legislative updates, and opportunities to network face-to-face for Tennessee county officials.

Board and membership meetings consisted of the Tennessee County Services Association (TCSA), Tennessee County Highway Officials Association (TCHOA), Association of County May-

ors (ACM), and the Tennessee County Commissioners Association (TCCA). Members of each organization met to discuss issues facing counties across the state. They also discussed current legislation being considered by the Tennessee General Assembly which will affect county government and local infrastructure.

During Monday's lunch meeting of TCSA's general membership, two guest speakers were present to discuss opportunities available to counties across the state:

- Taylre Beaty, State Broadband Director for the Tennessee Department of

Economic and Community Development (ECD), first spoke to the general membership about recent and upcoming funding avail-

able to expand access to broadband internet throughout the state. The American Rescue Plan will provide \$400 million in funding for immediate broadband access to rural and urban counties, further connecting communities in today's world. ECD is accepting applica-

tions this spring and will select award recipients in summer 2022. Beaty encouraged county officials to communicate with and support local providers in the application process.

- Jessica Southern, Local Outreach Director for ParTners for Health, presented available health plan options for local county governments to purchase through the State Group Insurance Plan. This program provides multiple choices for networks, carriers, tiers of care, and voluntary insurance, and it also offers tools for cost transparency, member discounts, and more. Southern outlined the requirements for local government enrollment and also described retiree health coverage.

On Monday afternoon, Education Commissioner Penny Schwinn visited with both TCCA and ACM members to discuss the proposed Tennessee Investment for Student Achievement (TISA) Act. The newly designed education funding formula proposed by the Governor, TISA, is now being considered by the Tennessee Legislature to overhaul the nearly thirty-year-old Basic Education Program (BEP) funding formula.

County mayors and county commissioners alike asked questions of the Commission-

er about the formula's impact on county operations. Commissioner Schwinn emphasized the formula's purpose of addressing specific students' needs and heard from a variety of viewpoints from county officials.

Tuesday's Legislative Breakfast hosted multiple notable speakers. Governor Bill Lee, Lieutenant Governor Randy McNally, Comptroller of the Treasury Jason Mumpower, and House Speaker Cameron Sexton spoke to county officials and partners at Tuesday's breakfast. A number of state legislators were also in attendance at the breakfast.

From the podium, multiple speeches inspired chuckles from the audience. Lt. Governor McNally gave updates on the 2022 legislative session and told several lighthearted stories about his time in the Legislature. Comptroller Mumpower described the importance of sound government practices. Rather than remaining stoic, Mumpower reminded county officials with a smile: "It's always better to call the Comptroller's Office before the Comptroller's Office calls you."

Speaker Sexton gave legislative updates about the House of Representatives, while keynote speaker Governor Bill Lee discussed the TISA funding formula, which is one of the Governor's key pieces of legislation this year. Gov. Lee also praised the

state's continued economic success and said that the culture and economy of Tennessee continue to attract businesses and people to the state in droves.

Over 250 county officials and guests turned out for County Government Day, and

TCSA was delighted to see everyone again. TCSA's next conference will be the Post-Legislative Conference in Gatlinburg, Tennessee from May 24-26, 2022. For more information, visit the TCSA website at www.tncounties.org.



Governor Bill Lee speaking to the TCSA Membership at the Legislative Breakfast on Tuesday morning, March 1



Multiple committees met throughout the multi-day conference, including TCCA Executive Board (pictured)

Governor Presents Proposed FY 2022 - 2023 Budget During State of the State Address

As the cold temperatures set in late evening on Monday, January 31, 2022, Governor Bill Lee began with his State of the State address and presented the proposed FY 2022 - 2023 state budget. In the speech, the governor laid out his priorities for the year and gave a brief outline of some of his administration's funding proposals. His theme focused on the slogan "Tennessee - America at Its Best." Lee touted the state's fiscal conservatism and small government philosophy as being key to its success.

"Tennessee stands as a beacon to the rest of the country for how we can change lives when we control the size of government, prioritize efficiency, and make smart and responsible investments. I am proud to propose a budget and America at Its Best policies that reinforce freedom, innovation, exceptionalism and optimism," said Governor Lee.

The next day, Finance & Administration Commissioner Butch Eley presented a more detailed overview of the budget proposal to both the Senate and House Finance Committees. In introducing Commissioner Eley, Senate Finance Chair Bo Watson spoke of how the proposed budget was unprecedented in its size. He

took a moment to caution the committee.

"The fact that we are living in incredibly prosperous times does not remove our responsibility to be fiscally disciplined in how we manage the taxpayer's dollars. Perhaps now, more than ever we need to exercise that kind of discipline," said Watson.

Commissioner Eley likewise took moments in his presentation to talk about the uncertainty and perhaps unsustainability of the current unprecedented revenue growth experienced by the state.

"It's important that we not build a recurring budget based on one-time spending patterns that we do not know will continue and likely will not continue," said Eley.

He even played clips from the funding board meeting last November where economists talked about how federal stimulus payments are artificially increasing the amount of large-ticket durable goods being purchased by consumers. During the pandemic,

economists believe spending patterns shifted away from services (which generally are not subject to sales tax) toward more expensive purchases like appliances, home



Photo Courtesy the Office of Governor Bill Lee (Source: Youtube)

improvement, etc. (which are subject to sales tax). Not only do they expect spending will return to a more normal balance between goods and services, they pointed out that such durable goods are not things that consumers will continue to purchase over and over each year.

The total proposed budget for FY23 is \$52.6 billion. The state begins this budget cycle with more than \$3.5 billion dollars in recurring revenue growth. These funds are a combination of extraordinary economic

growth, revenue collections in excess of budget projections, and also significant recurring revenues that were spent last year on non-recurring expenses as a safeguard against any

drop in revenue. Those funds are now eligible to pay for recurring expenses or a different non-recurring use. In fact, the proposed budget is repeating this mechanism by using \$1.3 billion in recurring revenue for non-recurring purposes once again. The total proposed increases in the budget amount to \$2.29 billion in new recurring spending and \$5.7 billion in new non-recurring.

Education

The budget includes massive

proposed increases in K-12 education spending. This includes around \$125 million in additional funds for teacher compensation and around \$70 million in annual growth and inflationary increases in the BEP. But these increases are dwarfed by an additional \$750 million the Governor intends to

add to the budget this year for a new education funding formula he hopes to have in place by the following year. For the upcoming budget, he intends to spend the \$750 million on one time expenses - \$550 million in Career and Technical Education

See Budget, Page 5

Nashville-Davidson Co. Welcomes New Transportation Director

Diana Alarcon has been named the director of the newly formed Nashville Department of Transportation. She brings more than 30 years of private and public sector experience to the position. The department is responsible for sustainable transportation policy, planning and programming, street maintenance, traffic engineering, engineering, real estate, parking, and regional transit operation.

Diana has served as director of transportation and mobility for the City of Tucson, the second-most populated city in Arizona, since 2018. Prior to that she was transportation and mobility director for the City of Fort Lauderdale (2011-2018), where she launched Fort Lauderdale's then-new department of transportation.

She is an active member in the Women in Transportation Seminar, American Society of Civil Engineers, Urban Land Institute, American Planning Association, National Transit Institute, American Public Works Association, National Association of City Transportation Officials, and the International Parking & Mobility Institute.

Diana began with NDOT in mid-January. She replaces Shanna Whitelaw, who had served as director of Public Works while NDOT was being implemented. The functions of Public Works are now under the direction of the new Department of Transportation.

We welcome Diana as the newest member of TCHOA.



TENNESSEE COUNTY NEWS



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www.tncounties.org

TVA Launches Inaugural Green Bond Offering, Sets Interest Rate Record

The Tennessee Valley Authority announced and priced a \$500 million offering of 10-year maturity green bonds today, its first offering of a sustainability-focused financial instrument.

Based on TVA's recently released Sustainable Financing Framework, the bonds will fund ongoing capital investments that build on TVA's industry-leading Environment, Social and Governance successes and support meeting the goals of TVA's Strategic Intent and Guiding Principles endorsed by the Board of Directors in May 2021.

A key intent of that document is to aggressively move TVA toward a sustainable, net-zero carbon energy future by 2050 while maintaining low costs and reliability. "TVA's financial position has strengthened over the past decade, and we are continuing our disciplined financial approach as we invest in the energy system of the future," said John Thomas, TVA Chief Financial & Strategy Officer. "Low cost financing for our strategic capital investments will contribute to keeping energy rates as low as feasible even as we make progress toward our net-zero carbon aspirational goal."

The bonds carry a coupon interest rate of 1.500%, which sets a record for the lowest rate ever achieved by TVA on a 10-year financing. TVA's previous record on a 10-year maturity was set in 2012, with a rate of 1.875%. The record low rate on the bonds will save TVA over \$15 million in annual interest expense compared to bonds that matured earlier in 2021.

Proceeds from the sale will be used to fund TVA's upcoming significant capital investments for increased renewable energy generation, energy storage, transmission system upgrades and development of advanced clean energy technologies. A potential TVA solar project in northern Alabama and a potential TVA energy storage project in eastern Tennessee – both still undergoing detailed environmental reviews – are two possible uses of the funding. As part of the green bond format, TVA expects to report on the allocations of net proceeds of the bonds annually until proceeds are fully allocated.

"TVA's first green bond is a milestone for our financing program," said Tammy Wilson, TVA

Treasurer and Chief Risk Officer. "Today's record-setting transaction demonstrates that the financial community is focused on investments in cleaner energy, and supportive of TVA's sustainability goals."

TVA's green bond offering drew over \$2 billion in initial orders from a variety of investors, including money managers, state governments, insurance companies, and others. Bank of America Securities served as Green Structuring Agent for the transaction, and joint book-running manager. Barclays, Morgan Stanley, RBC Capital Markets, and TD Securities, also served as joint book-running managers for the transaction.

The new bonds will mature on Sept. 15, 2031, and are not subject to redemption prior to maturity. Interest will be paid semi-annually each March 15 and Sept. 15. Application has been made to list the bonds on the New York Stock Exchange. The bonds will be issued, maintained and transferred through the book-entry system of the Federal Reserve Banks. Transactions may be cleared and settled by international participants through Clearstream and Euroclear. The bonds can be identified by the CUSIP number 880591EX6 (ISIN number US880591EX64).

The terms of the bonds are consistent with TVA's Sustainable Financing Framework, which outlines the categories of strategic capital projects where the proceeds may be allocated, including renewables, energy storage, energy efficiency, transmission investments that support TVA's clean energy goals, and research and development expenditures related to other categories identified in the framework.

TVA obtained a second-party opinion on its framework from global analytical firm Sustainalytics, which concluded that TVA's Sustainable Financing Framework is credible, impactful and aligned with relevant sustainability and green bond standards and principles. The Sustainalytics opinion and other details can be accessed from the ESG Information for Investors section of TVA's Investor Relations website at www.tva.com/investors.

If you have additional questions about the bond offering, you can address those questions to TVA's Investor Relations team at investor@tva.gov.

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

In Times of Chaos, Find Peace

Firstly, I'd like to thank all the members and partners that attended County Government Day a few weeks ago. It was great to return to in-person meetings, and I hope it motivated all of our members in attendance to go back to your counties and continue the great work that you and your fellow officials are doing. We'd been looking forward to an in-person County Government Day for years, and we finally returned to some normal procedures this year.

However, it seems like there's a lot going on in our world lately. As county officials, it can be especially difficult to go above and beyond the call of duty these days. I had quite an extensive list of catastrophes in the last edition of TCN that our state had experienced, and it seems like that list keeps growing.

In times of chaos, though, I think it's important to remember *why* we serve our communities. Our faith in our com-

Joyce Holt
 TCSA President
 Lewis County Highway Superintendent



munity and our God guides us, and the depth of this faith shows up in our counties everyday. If you don't have faith in your county, why serve it? If county citizens don't have faith in you as a leader, then why would they have elected you?

All this is to say that, Without our faith in both community and God to guide us, we could never find peace; without peace, we could never find joy—in our service, in our relationships *or* in our world.

Personally, I saw so many of our county leaders' abilities to deepen these

relationships at County Government Day. From committee to general membership meetings, our county leaders met to discuss heavy issues that are affecting their friends, family and neighbors in real time.

This type of commitment and service is what has made the United States the greatest country in the history of the world. We wouldn't have a strong country without the local partnerships and service carried out by our county governments.

As each seemingly world-ending scenario comes at us, I continue to believe we can better navigate the situation.

It's up to all of us as local leaders to weather each storm, and our faith will allow us to best serve our citizens and find peace through each storm that, too, will pass!

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Change for the Change's Sake?

We've all had our share of disruptive changes to deal with over the last couple of years. Unfortunately, it looks like the forecast for the days ahead continues to be partly uncertain with a 50% chance of transformation in the afternoon. The war in Ukraine, inflation, rising fuel costs and other challenges in our economy, elections... all of these things bring uncertainty into our lives. Much of this is out of our control. Some of it we can influence.

One of the big changes facing county governments right now is a complete revision of the state's education funding formula. Public schools make up as much as two thirds of a county's budget. So, any changes in state funding don't just have ripple effects, they can create tidal waves. When officials were in town at the end of February, they heard a presentation from Commissioner Penny Schwinn about the administration's proposed changes. They are sweeping. They accompany a push from the Governor to add \$1 billion in recurring state dollars to K-12 education funding over the next two years. With that bold investment, Gov. Lee wants to resolve current litigation over the adequacy of state education funding and leave his mark on how education is funded in Tennessee for future decades.

The current funding formula – the Basic Education Program – was born out of litigation. In the early 1990's there were multiple attempts to replace the old foundation program in response to lawsuits from poorer rural districts who alleged that students in their counties did not have access to the same educational opportunities as those living in wealthier districts. The plaintiffs prevailed in these equity suits and eventually the Education Improvement Act passed to enact the BEP and enact other reforms like moving from elected to appointed school superintendents.

Ever since the Education Improvement Act passed, the legislature has seen bills filed repeatedly to go back to electing school superintendents. While not every year, there have also been chang-

es proposed to the BEP. In some cases, these were minor increases to certain components. The two previous governors, Haslam and Bredesen before him, also sought to enact more sweeping changes.

Bredesen introduced what he called BEP 2.0 around 2008. This added the new CBER fiscal capacity model and provided additional funding to improve certain components of the formula like ELL and at-risk children. The intent at the time was to eventually move entirely to the CBER model and phase out TACIR's fiscal capacity model when all of the additional proposed funding was provided. The problem was, the economy took a downturn, additional funding didn't materialize and the remaining improvements and changes were never implemented.

Gov. Haslam likewise convened a panel to consider and make recommendations for changing the formula. Instead of completing the changes started under BEP 2.0, his administration repealed some of the proposals that were never fully implemented and codified keeping a blended fiscal capacity model. Neither Haslam nor Bredesen ended up advocating a complete shift to a new formula.

Gov. Lee has done that. His Tennessee Invests in Student Achievement proposal radically shifts the funding from a "resource-based" model to a "student-centered" model. The BEP takes the number of students in your school system and converts that over to the number of personnel, equipment, materials and facilities needed to serve that population. There have always been arguments about whether it generated enough funds and that eventually led to adequacy lawsuits.

TISA starts with a student and asks what is needed to fund base services for that individual. The answer

this administration proposes to that question is \$6,860. That's the base per pupil amount every student begins with. Then individual students are assessed additional weights based on whether they live, their family's income and any unique learning needs the child might have (ELL, special education, dyslexia, etc.). This dramatic change is accompanied by an equally dramatic proposed investment of an additional \$1 billion in new state funding. We are continuing to investigate the details of this new formula and determine its impact on counties, not just next year, but for several years out. Without this information, it will be difficult to know if this change is positive overall for counties or if it creates more problems than it solves.

There are aspects of the BEP that I like (not a lot of people say that). It has built in inflationary factors. While the computation can get complex, you can see how many teachers the formula funds and how much salary it is providing and compare those to real world expenditures. One of the most hated aspects of the BEP – fiscal capacity – is being migrated over to this new model. Whether the way it is computed changes or not is still to be seen. A billion dollars of new funding increases the size of the "pie" enough that people hope most folks won't complain as much about the size of their serving. But how you slice the pie is always going to be an aspect of any formula due to the Supreme Court cases in the 1990s around funding equity.

I don't think the fact that a formula is thirty years old is reason itself to scrap it. But I can also understand why someone making a bold investment in a program wants to use that moment in time to transform it. Like everything else, the devil is in the details and we need to know at least a projection of what this change will look like before we decide to impose it on ourselves.



David Connor
 TCSA Executive Director

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@TCSANews1954



...or scan this code with your smartphone camera then follow the link.

SCAN ME

- County Profile - Johnson County

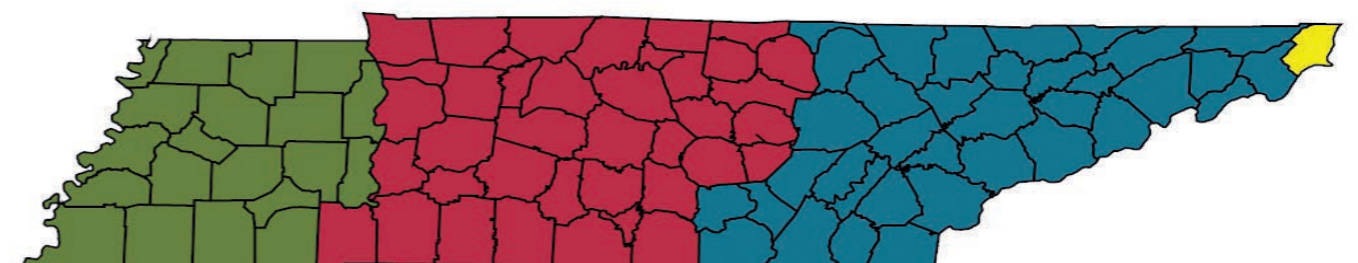
Population: 17,948, U.S. 2020 Census

County Seat: Mountain City

Area in Square Miles: 303 sq. miles

County Road Miles: 380.25

Interesting Information: The organization of Johnson County took place in 1836 and was named for Thomas Johnson, a leading citizen of Carter County and an early settler on the Doe River.



Attractions and Events: Johnson County is home to many types of attractions including historical sites, museums, theater, parks and music. There are also several nature based attractions such as Watagua Lake, Doe Mountain Recreation Area, and the Snake Motorcycle and Sports Car Route. Visit www.explorejohnsoncounty.com for more events and attractions information.

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Treasury Issues Final Rule for ARP Funds

*From the office of Comptroller Jason Mumpower
Released January 11, 2022*

The U.S. Treasury released its Final Rule guidance regarding the American Rescue Plan Act on January 6, 2022. TN Comptroller's Office has included a link to the document and the accompanying Overview of the Final Rule document on a website dedicated to the American Rescue Act Plan at tncot.cc/covid

Below are some key points included in the new guidance documents we want to bring to your attention. We also recommend that you read through the Overview of the Final Rule document for further information.

1) The final rule takes effect on April 1, 2022. Until that time, the interim final rule remains in effect and funds spent consistent with the interim final rule comply with program requirements. However, recipients can choose to take advantage of the final rule's flexibilities and simplifications now, ahead of the effective date.

2) One of the most impactful changes in the final rule is found in the revenue loss category. This guidance provides that any government can elect to take a "standard allowance" for revenue loss of up to \$10 million, allowing governments to select between the standard allowance or complete the full revenue loss calculation contained in the guidance. The significance of this change is that the revenue loss category can be used to fund any "government services." This is much less restrictive than some of the other allowable categories.

3) The guidance from the interim final rule mentions stormwater projects as an example of allowable uses under the category of sewer and water infrastructure. The final rule expands the guidance of allowed projects under this category and includes detailed examples such as culvert repair; dam and reservoir rehabilitation to provide safe drinking water; lead remediation projects; and improving access to safe drinking water for citizens served by residential wells. Please refer to the final rule for more details of these expanded allowable projects. Our Office continues to believe that the investment allowed for sewer and water infrastructure is one of the most impactful uses

of these funds for your citizens, particularly when paired with the Tennessee Department of Environment & Conservation's non-competitive grant program.

4) The final rule contains detailed discussions, explanations, and examples of expenses eligible under the category of "responding to the public health emergency" for low-income and underserved communities. Please refer to the final rule documents for details if you are considering these types of programs.

5) The final rule has greatly expanded the list of critical sectors and occupations eligible for premium pay. The list has been extended to include all "state, local, or tribal workforce." The same eligibility criteria are in effect. Please see our memo dated July 9, 2021, for details concerning premium pay eligibility. Our previous memos can also be found at tncot.cc/covid.

6) The final rule provides further guidance related to capital expenditures incurred under any of the eligible categories (other than revenue loss). The related reporting in the federal portal will require detailed justification of the capital expenditures. Additionally, the final rule lists categories of capital projects that Treasury will "presume are ineligible." These include construction of a new correctional facility as a response to increased rates of crime; construction of new congregate facilities to decrease spread of COVID-19 in the facility; and construction of convention centers, stadiums, or other large capital projects intended for general economic development. Please refer to the final rule for further details regarding guidance for capital projects.

7) The final rule reiterates the following costs, originally contained in the interim final rule, that remain unallowable across all categories, including the revenue loss category:

a) Funds cannot be used to reimburse costs incurred by your government prior to March 3, 2021.

b) Funds cannot be used to replenish or make contributions to rainy day funds or other reserve funds.

c) Funds cannot be used to pay interest, principal, or costs on debt. This includes long-term debt, short-term revenue or tax anticipation



The UT County Technical Assistance Service (CTAS) offers training to county officials related to various duties and responsibilities of those county officials. County officials are legally required to log a certain number of training hours per calendar year. Class subjects range from county government, administrative operations and various technical skills to better equip county officials to best serve their constituents and neighbors. Several upcoming training courses are available, including:

CTAS Upcoming Trainings (Spring 2022)	
March 30, 2022 Adequate Facilities Tax (1 Credit) Online via Zoom (1 Hour)	April 7, 2022 Managing Property Assessment Appeals (4 Credits) Knoxville (4 Hours)
March 30, 2022 Mid-Year Raises & Letters of Agreement (1 Credit) Online via Zoom (1 Hour)	April 12, 2022 Managing Property Assessment Appeals (4 Credits) Nashville (4 Hours)
March 30, 2022 Spring Elective Series - In-Person (3 Credits) Nashville (4 Hours)	April 14, 2022 Managing Property Assessment Appeals (4 Credits) Jackson (4 Hours)

NACo Launching Next High-Performance Leadership Academy Cohort in April 2022

The NACo High Performance Leadership Academy is an innovative, completely online 12-week program created to equip frontline county government professionals with practical leadership skills to deliver results for counties and communities.

With a robust curriculum developed by the Professional Development Academy in partnership with Fortune 1000 executives, public sector leaders, world-renowned academics and thought leaders, including General Colin Powell and Dr. Marshall Goldsmith, HPLA was designed specifically for the unique challenges and opportunities of serving in county government.

The program is guided by an expert moderator to help keep participants on track, and a world-class faculty of prominent public, private and academic sector leaders deliver engaging and thought-provoking sessions.

- HPLA focuses on five practical skills:
- LEAD:** Engage teams and stakeholders to foster positive climates and exceed common expectations
 - ORGANIZE:** Plan, lead and execute organizational change more effectively and consistently
 - COLLABORATE:** Establish alignment and strong partnerships through building stronger relationships
 - COMMUNICATE:** Create clarity, confidence and community
 - DELIVER:** Measure projects and processes to deliver results aligned with county and community priorities

A world-class faculty of prominent public, private and university sector leaders will deliver each course. All module content is guided by an expert moderator.

To learn more about or register for the HPLA program, please visit www.naco.org/resources/education-and-training/naco-high-performance-leadership-academy

Comptroller's Office Releases Online Redistricting Dashboard

Tennesseans can now see how the 2021-2022 redistricting process has impacted them through a simple address search.

The Tennessee Comptroller's Office has created a new online dashboard entitled Tennessee District Lookup that makes it easy to see which legislative districts are now assigned to each address in the Volunteer State.

The new dashboard includes updated legislative district information for County Commissions, the State House, State Senate, and the U.S. Congress. Voting precinct and other information is also included for certain localities. Some information, including voting precincts, may be updated as it is adjusted or becomes available.

The decennial redistricting process, which was completed at the state and local level in 2021 and 2022, has impacted more than 2.5 million addresses in Tennessee. The new legislative districts will be applied when voters go to the polls later this year.

"This easy-to-use dashboard is a simple way to see how you and your family will be represented in future elections," said Comptroller of the Treasury Jason Mumpower. "Redistricting and reapportionment help ensure that our elective bodies adhere to the 'one person, one vote' standard of representation. With the shift in district boundaries, it's important for all Tennesseans to know which district they are in."

To use the new Tennessee District Lookup dashboard please visit tncot.cc/indistrict and enter your address in the box at the top left corner of the webpage. Once your address is selected you will see both your new and prior district assignments.

If you suspect fraud, waste, or abuse of public money in Tennessee, call the Comptroller's toll-free hotline at 800.232.5454, or file a report online at: tncot.cc/fraud. Follow us on twitter @TNCOT and Instagram @tncot

Mark Your Calendars
TCSA Legislative Conference
 May 24 - 26, 2022
 Gatlinburg, TN

NACo Annual Conference
 July 21-24, 2022
 Adams County, Colorado

TCSA 68th Annual Fall Conference & Trade Show
 October 11-13, 2022
 Murfreesboro, TN



CERTIFIED COUNTY FINANCE OFFICER (CCFO) PROGRAM

COURSE FORMAT: The CCFO program consists of 11 courses, with 7-8 courses offered in person at locations across the state and the remaining 3-4 courses offered in an online or virtual format.

CLASS LOCATIONS: Currently, monthly classes are offered in Knoxville, Chattanooga, Cookeville, Nashville, Jackson, and Memphis. Locations are subject to change based upon enrollment.

APPLY NOW! Apply with the Tennessee Comptroller's Office at <https://apps.cot.tn.gov/CCFO>

April cohort registration deadline is March 31.
Visit www.ctas.tennessee.edu for more information.

Tennessee Still Confident in Election Integrity

By: Mary Grace Donaldson, CTAS Policy & Communications Assistant

On Tuesday, January 25, Secretary of State Tre Hargett and Director of Elections Mark Goins gave a presentation to the House Local Government Committee. Entitled "Tennessee Elections: Easy to Vote, Hard to Cheat," this presentation outlined election integrity in Tennessee. They reflected on the 2020 election and also responded to questions from legislators about voting in Tennessee. The presentation in many ways reflected what our members heard from Secretary Hargett at the fall conference in Memphis.

Goins described that it is easy to register to vote and easy to cast a vote in Tennessee. One can register to vote online through the Secretary of State's website, by mail, or in person at a county election commission office. He reported that the online voter registration feature is widely popular and also ensures security. Also, Tennessee makes it easy to cast a vote through an extensive early voting period and through

by-mail voting, for those eligible to vote by mail. According to Goins, in the November 2020 general election, about 3 out of 4 Tennessee voters voted in one of these early methods, mostly through early voting.

Goins and Hargett detailed security measures and processes implemented to prevent election fraud. One of the primary ways to maintain election integrity is to maintain current voter registration lists. The Coordinator of Elections' office regularly removes ineligible voters and adds newly registered voters on an ongoing basis. A voter may become ineligible due to a change of address, being deceased, or committing a felony. Election administrators are in regular contact with the USPS, other counties and states, and other trustworthy entities to ensure that each person is only eligible to vote in the place they currently reside.

Election integrity is also maintained by implementing security training, approving

certified voting systems, and ensuring bipartisan participation in every step of the voting process. Tennessee elections do not run on one statewide system.

Instead, counties can choose from among five certified voting system vendors, and each county's system operates independently. Election results are never transmitted automatically from a voting machine. Each county election commission must manually enter the election data into the Secretary of State's system, and when the election results are submitted, they are automatically shared on Twitter to increase transparency. On election night, the Secretary of State's office contacts each county election commission by phone to verify the results received from that county.

The 2020 general election showed both record turnout and a record number of registered voters in Tennessee. Election commissions did encounter more voters who had requested mail-in ballots

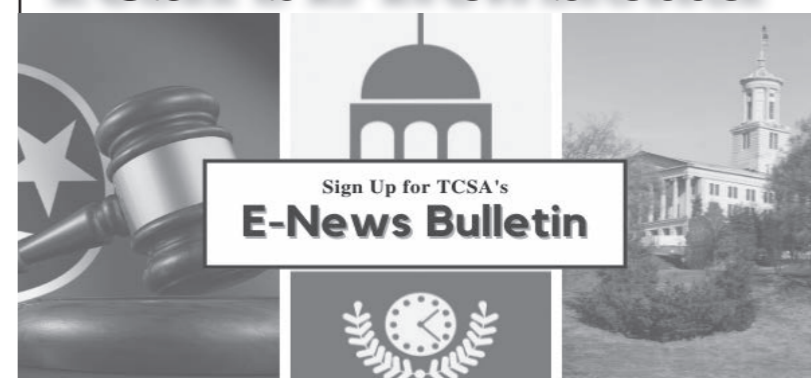
later deciding to come vote in person. Secretary Hargett speculated that this was possibly due to the concerns by voters over whether their ballot would arrive in time when they mailed it. The U.S. Postal Service had publicly talked about concerns over their ability to timely deliver ballots.

The Secretary of State believes this led some voters to request a mail-in ballot, only to change their mind and choose to vote early or in-person on election day. Once a voter requests a ballot by mail, they are marked as having voted in poll books. If they subsequently appear in person to vote, election officials know to treat that voter differently. They may cast a provisional ballot which is not counted until the election commission is able to verify that the mail-in ballot has not already been received. That way, election commissions ensure that only one vote was recorded per person.

Hargett said that no election is without some minor amount of fraud. He knows of between 10 and 20 individual cases of voter fraud in the Tennessee 2020 election amidst 3 million votes. This number is so low because of the safeguards that Tennessee has implemented. Overall, Goins and Hargett are confident in the trustworthiness of Tennessee's elections and are even proactively developing additional safeguards. According to the Center for Excellence in Polling, 86% of Republicans, 84% of Democrats, and 85% of Independents in Tennessee are confident in the Tennessee's election integrity. Both Hargett and Goins take pride in that result and hope that their ongoing efforts to secure Tennessee's elections and encourage more voter participation are paying off.

The presentation may be viewed in full on the TN General Assembly website at www.capitol.tn.gov.

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TCSA E-News includes regular Legislative Updates and related news that directly affects local county officials across the state.

Sign up today and stay up-to-date by receiving the latest news straight to your email inbox. Please contact Wes Doyle, Communications Specialist at wesley.doyle@tennessee.edu to sign up for this newsletter.

(You can also scan the QR code with your mobile phone camera to immediately sign up.)



Celebrate National County Government Month 2022

National County Government Month (NCGM), held each April, is an annual celebration of county government. Since 1991, the National Association of Counties has encouraged counties to actively promote the services and programs they offer.

Counties can schedule activities any time during the month. NCGM is an excellent opportunity for Tennessee counties to highlight effective county programs and raise public awareness and understanding about the various services provided to the community.

Visit www.naco.org/resources/featured/2022-ncgm for more resources about celebrating NCGM this April 2022.

Need money for local projects?



HICKMAN COUNTY recently issued a \$768,344 highway department note to purchase equipment. The county has used all of the TCSA loan programs over the years and closed on a \$1.3 million loan in Fall 2018 to purchase land and finance sewer system improvements.

Call 615/255-1561 to find out how TCSLP can help you.



Saving feels better.

The National Association of Counties (NACo) has enhanced the Live Healthy Discount Program to deliver greater healthcare savings to county residents at NO COST to the county.

No-cost Prescription Discount Program.

- Save an average of 30%* at more than 66,000 pharmacies nationwide

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To learn more and enroll your county, visit NACo.org/Health

*This is not insurance. Savings may vary by drug and by pharmacy. The Prescription Discount Card is operated by CVS Caremark®. The Discount Medical Organization for NACo Health and Dental Discounts is Alliance HealthCard of Florida, Inc. All rights reserved.
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BUDGET
From Page 1

Grants and \$200 million for relocating every public school in Tennessee currently located in a floodplain. The budget also includes \$32 million additional funds for charter school facilities, with half of that amount recurring.

Transportation

Recognizing that Tennessee is one of the fastest growing states in the nation, the budget also includes significant general fund investments in transportation, including:

- \$77 million in economic development projects;
- \$266 million for a highway partnership program;
- \$176 million for a rural interchange program;
- \$100 million for accelerating IMPROVE Act projects; and
- \$4 million for enhanced litter removal

Under previous administrations, the highway fund was raided to help support general fund needs. Those funds were later restored. This is perhaps the first time in many decades that general fund dollars (the \$100 million to speed up IMPROVE Act projects) are proposed to be transferred to the highway fund for transportation projects.

Rainy Day Fund & Liability Reductions

The budget also includes proposals to deposit \$50 million in the rainy day fund, spend \$300 million to reduce unfunded liability for post employment benefits and another \$350 million to reduce unfunded liability for the Tennessee Consolidated Retirement System. These investments would be in addition to any actuarially required payments. The \$50 million to the rainy day fund is smaller than deposits in recent years, but Eley noted that the fund,

combined with the TennCare reserves, now exceeds \$2 billion.

The state's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) shows that there are numerous other funds where additional reserves are held in addition to these two funds. In fact, according to the CAFR for the year ending June 30, 2021, the state increased its new unrestricted fund balance from all funds combined from \$7.5 billion to \$10.7 billion in one year.

Law Enforcement & Public Safety

The Governor spoke of his

unwavering commitment to law enforcement in his State of the State address. In this budget, he is proposing:

- Nearly \$16 million to hire an additional 100 troopers for the highway patrol;
- Over \$24 million additional funds for the TBI to assist with crime investigations, including additional cybersecurity and forensic specialists;
- \$66 million in non-recurring funding to assist local governments with law enforcement hiring; and
- \$355 million for a new proposed multi-agency law enforcement facility to be built in the Cockrill Bend area near the Riverview Maximum Security prison in Nashville.

Looking Forward: The Budget's Impact on Counties

As we continue to analyse

the governor's proposed budget and provisions that will impact county governments, we will continue to keep you informed.

Obviously, the additional billion dollars in education funding is a massive investment in our public schools. This proposed injection of additional state dollars is greatly appreciated. However, as the proposed Tennessee

Invests In Student Achievement Act is a drastic rewrite of our state's education funding formula. We are meeting with the administration and legislative leadership to get key questions answered and gather data about how the specifics of the proposal will affect individual counties, not just in year one, but for several years going forward.

TACIR: Tennessee Needs at Least \$61.9 Billion of Public Infrastructure Improvements

Tennessee needs at least \$61.9 billion worth of public infrastructure improvements during the five-year period of July 2020 to June 2025—a \$3.4 billion (5.7%) increase from the year before—according to a new report by the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR).

Of the \$3.4 billion increase in infrastructure needs reported in this year's inventory, just over \$2.0 billion (60.2%) is attributable to increases in the estimated cost for Transportation and Utilities, followed by \$978 million (29.4%) for increases in the cost of Education. Infrastructure needs for Transportation and Utilities increased for the sixth year in a row.

Increases in the cost of road projects (\$1.5 billion) and an increase in new road projects (\$1.1 billion) attributed to the overall increase of transportation infrastructure, though these costs were offset by \$521 million in completed road projects. Additionally, Nashville reports needing high capacity bus rapid transit at a cost of \$506 million.

The \$978 million increase in needed improvements for education infra-

structure is also attributable to the overall increase in the total estimated cost of the inventory. Most of this increase is from the \$1 billion rise in needed improvements for post-secondary education, while the need for school renovations increased by \$141 million. The increase in the estimated cost of needed improvements to post-secondary education stems mainly from \$1.6 billion in new projects.

Needs also increased for Health, Safety, and Welfare (\$575 million), which is attributable to a 42% increase in law enforcement projects (\$601 million), and Recreation and Culture (\$7 million). Reported needs decreased in two categories: General Government (\$210 million) and Economic Development (\$9 million).

Information about funding for public infrastructure needs reported by officials indicates that 67.4% of the funds required to meet those needs was not available at the time the inventory was conducted—this was relatively unchanged from last year's 65.1%. Excluding improvements needed at existing schools and those drawn from capital budget requests submitted by state agencies—neither of which includes funding information—only

\$15.1 billion in funding is available for the remaining \$46.3 billion in needs.

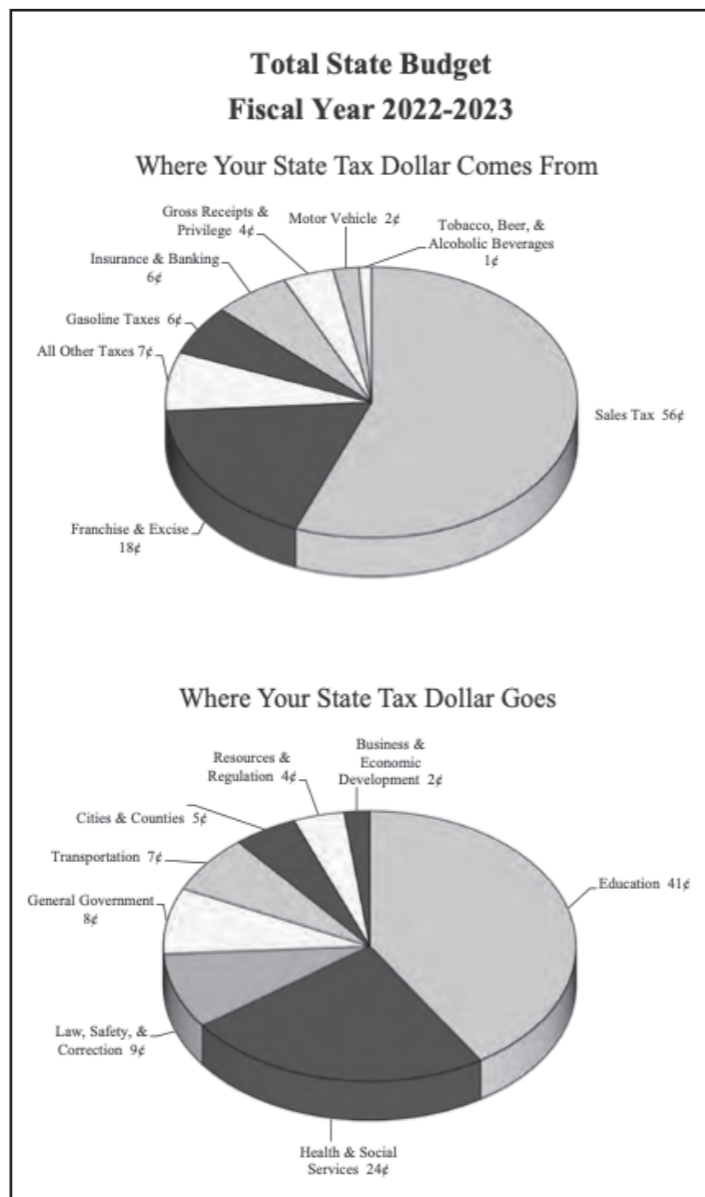
Total estimated costs for current infrastructure needs fall into six general categories:

- **Transportation and Utilities:** \$34.7 billion
- **Education:** \$15.2 billion
- **Health, Safety, and Welfare:** \$8.3 billion
- **Recreation and Culture:** \$2.3 billion
- **General Government:** \$1.3 billion
- **Economic Development:** \$277 million

For each county, the report includes one-page summaries, which list the estimated cost for all types of needed infrastructure in each county by stage of development, highlight the top three types of infrastructure improvements needed in each county based on the total estimated cost, and provide comparisons of the infrastructure needed at public school systems to student enrollment

The full report is available on TACIR's website at <https://www.tn.gov/tacir/infrastructure/infrastructure-reports/-building-tennessee-s-tomorrow-2020-2025.html>.

For more information, contact Tyler Carpenter, Project Manager, at tyler.carpenter@tn.gov or 615.253.4095.



"The Budget." Courtesy the Office of the Governor. Published 01.31.22. <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/finance/budget/documents/2023BudgetDocumentVol1.pdf>

TCSA Dues are Changing for 2022-2023

After several TCSA members suggested that the association take a look at the impact of population changes as a result of the 2020 census on dues, the TCSA board met on January 27th to review and discuss the association's dues structure. The dues had been based on a formula of a \$700 flat amount per county plus \$0.03 per capita. The dues were not adjusted to reflect new population counts following the 2010 census, and therefore had not been increased in roughly 20 years.

The board was in agreement that dues should be adjusted to help offset inflationary costs. Simply updating the formula to 2020 census figures would have generated around \$36,000 in additional income for the association. However, rural, urban, and suburban members of the board all felt that the cost increase should

not fall predominantly on a few fast-growing counties.

The board ultimately decided to increase the flat amount each county pays by \$100 to \$800 and then adjust the amount counties pay per capita to bring in roughly the same amount of funds that a straight population update would have. This lessened the dues increase on fast-growing counties without putting a major increase on counties with stable or declining population growth. For over 2/3 of counties, the increase will be less than \$200.

More detailed information will be sent to all counties with their new dues amount so that they can plan for their FY 2022-2023 budgets. As always, we appreciate the support from our members and remain committed to keeping membership costs low.

Hamilton County Hwy CAO Ben Wilson Retiring

After almost seven years as the Highway Chief Administrative Officer for Hamilton County, Ben Wilson is retiring from the post. Ben was instrumental in overseeing the Volkswagen project in the Chattanooga area while he was serving as an assistant superintendent. He has been with the county for nearly 33 years.



Retired Hamilton Co. Hwy CAO Ben Wilson

Ben has been an active supporter of the Tennessee County Highway Officials Association for his tenure and has served multiple times as regional secretary/treasurer in Region II. His position as administrator of the Hamilton County highway department is an appointed one.



Interim Hamilton Co. Hwy CAO Gene Quinn

Gene Quinn, a supervisor with the department, will serve as interim CAO until an appointment is made by the county mayor.

We all wish Ben well in his retirement and welcome Gene to TCHOA.

OMNIA PARTNERS COVID-19 RESOURCES

In this time of uncertainty, we know procurement teams are working tirelessly to address their school and public agency needs but are hindered by their availability to procure the necessary products and services, including personal protective equipment.

OMNIA Partners, a cooperative purchasing organization that provides government and educational institutions access to a large portfolio of competitively solicited contracts from industry-leading suppliers, has assembled a task force to address your evolving needs during this time. This task force is working with the executive teams of our supplier partners to assist in the deployment of their COVID-19 plans.

OFFERINGS IN OUR PORTFOLIO

<p>CLEANING & DISINFECTING SERVICES: Deep Cleaning Services Surface Disinfectant & Sanitizer Spray Service Laundered Apparel Turnkey Emergency Services</p>	<p>PPE & FACILITY SOLUTIONS: Masks, Gloves, Gowns & Kits Thermometers & Digital Scanners Plexiglass Barriers Air Filtration Systems Modular Buildings Elevator/Escalator Sanitization</p>	<p>CLEANING & DISINFECTING PRODUCTS: Surface Cleaners Exterior Antimicrobial Disinfectants Touch-free Sanitation (Interior & Exterior) Spray Nozzles & Pumps for Hand Sanitizer</p>
<p>FOOD: Self-Contained Lunch Packages Single-Serve Condiments To-Go Packaging Culinary Sanitation</p>	<p>TECHNOLOGY PRODUCTS: Hardware/Software Audio/Visual Remote Learning/Working Solutions Educational Software Zero-Touch Devices Cloud Solutions</p>	<p>FURNITURE: Mobile Cubes & Walls Workspace Separation Screens Outdoor Classroom Solutions Flexible Seating Quickship Solutions</p>

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Governor's Office Releases New Education Funding Formula

The newly announced Tennessee Investment for Student Achievement Act would replace the existing Basic Education Program

On Thursday, February 24, Governor Bill Lee and Commissioner of Education Penny Schwinn unveiled the new Tennessee public education funding formula for K-12 students. The existing formula, known as the Basic Education Program (BEP), was adopted by the state legislature about three decades ago in response to litigation brought by small rural school systems that showed their systems did not have access to the same resources as wealthier districts.

Late last year, Governor Lee announced his intention to replace this almost thirty-year-old formula. The Dept. of Education quickly named multiple committees of parents, teachers, business leaders and other stakeholders and held meetings throughout the fall to come up with concepts for a new funding formula. From the beginning, the administration has described what they wanted to develop as a "student-based" funding formula. The result of this effort is a bill known as the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA) Act.

Central to this concept is an effort to attribute a specific dollar amount of funding to be allocated to each one of the nearly one million children in Tennessee's K-12 public schools and charter schools. Each child will receive a base allocation, with weighted factors that provide additional funding to the student.

This framework is made up of several levels:

Base Funding: A base amount of \$6,860 per student regardless of grade level. Multiplied by roughly 960,000 students in Tennessee, this base generates around \$6.6 billion;

Weights: additional percentage enhancements for students with unique learning needs, such as being in

a sparsely populated community, having learning disabilities, or being in an economically disadvantaged community. Additional funding is also provided to students attending a charter school. According to the department, an additional \$1.8 billion in funding is included in these weights;

Direct Funding: specific amounts for students in specific programs or courses, such as K-3 literacy programs or high-value CTE courses. This comprises \$376 million in funding. It is unknown at this time how restrictive the uses of these funds will be;

Outcomes-Based Funding: per-student awards made to schools or school systems for positive measurable outcomes. The department has indicated it wants to make approximately \$100 million in funding available for outcomes-based incentives, but those funds would be subject to appropriation.

The emphasis of the TISA is on per-student funding.

To be clear, these funds go to school districts to spend based on the students' unique needs within the district. The money is intended to follow the child in the event they move to a new school system or choose to enroll in a charter school. While the administration claims this proposal is unrelated to controversial private school voucher legislation, it would create a structure that simplifies making individualized determinations of how much funding a parent would be entitled to if, in the future, a voucher program is implemented and parents withdraw their student from public school.

Currently, the legislation Lee championed in 2019 to create vouchers in Davidson and Shelby County is in court. The trial court held the law unconstitutional, and the

appeal is pending before the State Supreme Court. Arguments in the case were reheard in late February. A decision had been pending before the court when Justice Connie Clark passed away last fall.

The language of the amendment that would enact the TISA funding formula was released publicly on February 24th. With legislators openly talking about a desire to adjourn the legislative session before the end of April, this essentially gives the General Assembly less than two months to fully digest the 34-page bill and analyze how it will impact school districts across the state. If adopted, the bill is intended to take effect during the FY23-24 budget year. The language to implement the TISA Act is included in an amendment proposed to SB2396/HB2143. If this bill follows a typical path, it will be heard in both chambers' education and finance committees, as well as any other relevant committees.

Discussion at TCSA's 2022 County Government Day event in late February focused largely on this new education formula. Commissioner Schwinn attended the conference and gave presentations to both the ACM and TCCA memberships. County officials were encouraged to ask questions of the commissioner about the TISA's impact on their counties.

Some counties are concerned that the new formula does not actually provide enough funding to new education programs presented by the TISA on top of existing educational needs. Others wonder about the logistical burden of calculating a student-by-student formula per school district for all of Tennessee's students in the K-12 public school system. Several officials questioned why students attending char-

ter schools are automatically eligible for a 4% increase in their funding allocation. The Commissioner of Education answered that this simply reflected money made available to charter schools that was outside the BEP formula being pulled into the formula. The funds she was referring to are grants that the state has decided to make to charter schools to help them pay for facilities. While some of these funds are recurring, this line item has varied greatly from year to year and it has been limited. With the state looking to potentially add dozens more charter schools over the coming years, this would take a small line item in the state's budget and convert it into a recurring, ongoing obligation for both the state and all local governments that have a charter operating within their system.

The BEP has been in operation in Tennessee for three decades, so changing to TISA requires an overhaul of existing processes. While the BEP takes the number of students served by a local education agency (LEA) and converts that into staffing, materials, equipment and capital facilities needed to serve those students, the TISA assigns a specific funding amount for each of the approximately 960,000 students in the public K-12 school system. The BEP has four categories of funding, all supporting different elements of educational needs: instruction, benefits, classroom, and non-classroom. The individual components of these funding categories are based on a school system's average daily membership (ADM). The TISA, as previously described, is based on a per-student base funding amount with additional weights and allocations, which are defined in the legislation.

We are gathering information and analyzing data as quickly as possible to better inform TCSA members of how the TISA will affect local school systems across Tennessee. You can expect more timely contact from us via our weekly TCSA e-News email bulletin, along with emails about specific pieces of news as we receive updates on this education funding proposal.

The TCSA website also has several valuable resources specifically about TISA, such as explanations of the Governor's proposed new funding, key provisions in the draft of the new act, and a side-by-side comparison of TISA to BEP. We have also posted a file that has all of the allocation estimates which the Department of Education provided for all school systems in the state. These documents are available on www.tncounties.org. You can access the resources via our homepage, by clicking "Resources," then "Education Resources."

The Tennessee Department of Education website has plenty of information about the TISA as well. You may view it at www.tn.gov/education/tnedufunding.

UT Releases Salary Schedules for FY 2022-2023

Minimum salaries for FY2022-2023 are now available for budget planning purposes. The annualized general increase is tied to the increase in state employees' compensation, which Finance & Administration Commissioner Butch Eley on Dec. 13, 2021, certified as 6.18 percent.

Remember, however, that TCA 8-24-201(d) provides that the annualized general salary increase for certain county officials shall not exceed 5 percent in any given year.

As you begin your budget processes for the next fiscal year, refer to the CTAS online guidance provided by visiting www.ctas.tennessee.edu/county-salary-schedules

That site includes a detailed schedule by population class and county official title. You can also contact your CTAS field staff for additional information.



Education Commissioner Penny Schwinn recently spoke at County Government Day to county commissioners, mayors and guests about the TISA Education Formula



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A program of the Tennessee Treasury Department | David H. Lillard, Jr., Treasurer

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¹ Source: Empower Retirement's Lifetime Income Score V: Optimism and opportunity White Paper, March 2015.

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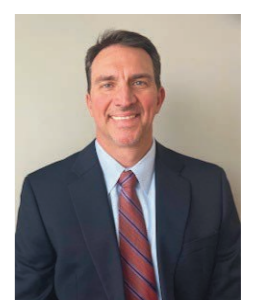
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— Jonathan Walden —

Walden: “Our [CTAS’s] Main Focus is to Make County Government Better in the State of Tennessee.”

By WES DOYLE
Communications Specialist II
County Technical Assistance
Service

As a native Nashvillian, Jonathan Walden (also known as “Jon” to friends and family) is passionate about serving his neighbors—both locally and statewide. He admittedly didn’t realize his passion for this kind of service, though, until he joined the University of Tennessee—County Technical Assistance Service (CTAS) team in 1993.

Jon was born in Nashville, but raised in Toledo, Ohio, before returning to Nashville in his late teen years to graduate from McGavock High School. He then earned his Bachelor of Science in Computer Science from Tennessee State University, and then Master’s in Leadership and Public Service from Lipscomb University—both top universities housed here in Nashville.

Although he served as Interim Executive Director from May 2020 to November 2021, Jon was permanently named Executive Director of CTAS on December 1, 2021. CTAS was formed in 1973 by the Tennessee Legislature, and it has been working closely with county governments since that time.

“I came to CTAS because of the chance to get more experience in my profession,” said Walden through a smile. “But the passion for serving the county officials and helping the citizens across Tennessee has kept me here nearly three decades.”

CTAS serves as a technical resource for all 95 Tennessee counties and works closely with county associations (including Tennessee County Services Association) to better assist county officials in addressing the issues affecting their communities. Per T.C.A. 49-9-402,

“County technical assistance service: (a) As a part of the Institute for Public Service, there is created a county technical assistance service to provide studies and research in county

government, publications, educational conferences and attendance at the conferences, and to furnish technical, consultative and field services to counties of the state in problems relating to fiscal administration, accounting, tax assessment and collection, law enforcement, improvements and public works, and in any and all matters relating to county government. (b) This program shall be carried on in cooperation with and with the advice of counties in the state acting through the Tennessee County Services Association and its board of directors, which is recognized as their official agency or instrumentality.”

TCN: Thank you for meeting with us today, Jon. It’s been a while since we’ve been able to showcase an official Executive Director of CTAS. How has your service through multiple positions in and around CTAS formed your perspective as the Executive Director?

J.W.: I’m going into my 29th year here at CTAS. I started here as an Administrator of Information Technology in October 1993. I’ve been able to see how technology has transformed not only what we do at CTAS, but how it has transformed some things in county government as well over the years.

Early in my career when I was the Administrator for Information Technology, Rodney Carmical was the Executive Director of CTAS at the time—and the executive director to hire me—took me to IPS [Institute for Public Service] leadership meetings with him on occasion. So even at an early age within my CTAS career, I had the opportunity to see how IPS fit within the University and how CTAS fit within IPS even before I was on the management team.

Coming in at that entry level position also gave me the opportunity to work with the very seasoned county government consultants at the time. I was able to glean knowledge from those consultants—as well as our attorneys—about how

county government worked.

I visited various counties across the state during that time as well, so I was able to sit with county mayors, highway officials and county fee officials to get an understanding of what county government looks and works like in the rural areas of Tennessee, and how it differs from governments in urban areas.

When I moved from the Administrator of IT to Manager of Information Technology and Environmental Services in August 2002, I’ve since tried to improve how our technology processes and systems have flowed for our staff to help them better serve our county officials.

TCN: How has CTAS changed since you first began with the organization?

J.W.: We didn’t have a management team in place before Rodney [Carmical] left the Executive Director position. When Mike Garland, who was the second director that I served under, formulated the CTAS management structure in 2002 that we still currently operate under, I worked as Manager of Information Technology and Environmental Services, and we had four departments within the CTAS structure: Department of Technology and Environmental Services, the Training Department, the Department of Legal Services and the Department of Field Services. [CTAS now has the Certified County Finance Officer department as well.]

In terms of the way we operate, our core way of operating has not changed—we may have changed the processes some by incorporating some newer technology, but our core way of operating is still focused on providing the best possible technical assistance to our county officials.

I’m proud to say I’ve worked with, oh, six of those seven directors that are hanging on the wall. So from a historical standpoint, with the exception of the very first elected director [Ralph Harris], I’ve worked with nearly every CTAS Executive Director in the organization’s history in some capacity. That guidance and experience has given me some of the greatest leadership insight I could ask for. It’s how I’m able to lead this organization today.

2023 will be the 50th anniversary of CTAS. I joined the organization in 1993, so I’ve served 30 years of these first 50 years, which, I think, is a blessing as well.

TCN: A major obstacle to much of the organization’s ability to serve has been the COVID-19 pandemic. How has the pandemic affected CTAS’s capability when it comes to training and assisting county governments across the state?

J.W.: Some of those conversations that I’d had early in my career with the management team helped me and the team formulate ideas on how to guide CTAS from a technology standpoint. We don’t really consider ourselves “cutting edge,” but we’re proud

of the work and the products we’ve produced prior to COVID changing the landscape.

We began to develop an e-Library system [or “eLi” as it’s commonly called] several years prior to the entire world converting to online meetings, trainings and hosting.

Since then, the technology and training teams have collaborated with other departments to address concerns and questions for our online training programs and certifications. We’d had contracts with LinkedIn Learning four or five years prior to our in-house trainings, but since then our training department has worked to develop our own internal, online courses to work in conjunction with our County Officials Certificate Training (COCTP.)

COVID allowed us to launch two new online certificates. The first online course released was our Certified Public Administrator program, and then our training department put together a Cybersecurity Online Certificate Training Program as well. We’ve got some others we’re planning to launch soon, but we’re very proud of the amount and quality of the trainings we’ve released so far.

[Note: CTAS currently offers the following certified training programs: Certified County Finance Officer (CCFO), County Administrative Professional Certificate (CAP), and Cybersecurity Awareness Training Certificate (CAT).]

Another significant challenge we faced was hosting the Capstone course, which is one of the final phases of the COCTP certification program that leads to a staff graduation. These are usually hosted in-person, but COVID forced us to re-evaluate and plan for a virtual meeting and graduation in 2020.

When COVID first hit in 2020, we had a different challenge to face: We had to figure out how to host the County Officials Orientation Program (COOP) for our new and current county officials in the height of a pandemic. Granted, this was a “mini”-COOP, so it was a scaled-down version of our traditional COOP meeting.

COOP is one of our biggest contributions to county officials, and it’s a great way for us to effectively train, meet and network with officials from across the state. This event is held every four years, and we’re preparing to host the event in-person August 2022.

We’re always trying new things that benefit either our staff to help our customers or releasing tools that benefit our customers firsthand. And one of the things I like about our team is the approach that, ‘no idea was a bad idea.’ We would try to make something work until we find out it really wouldn’t work.

We’re always looking for new ways to improve, and that’s something that’ll



CTAS Staff Meeting (December 2021); Nearly 2/3 of CTAS staff has worked with the organization fewer than five years, as Jon points out in his interview.

continue under my leadership.

TCN: As many public offices (both elected and appointed) continue to be politicized, how has CTAS managed to cultivate and maintain an overall positive relationship with county governments across Tennessee?

J.W.: We work with all county officials and their staff, and that will certainly continue. We’re always looking for ways to improve those working relationships as well.

CTAS has been fortunate to have great relationships with the seven association directors that work closely with county government. We’re all focused on that service, and I think that focus on service makes CTAS a true service organization. We have great working relationships with the Comptroller’s Office as well as Division of Local Government Audit, Division of Local Government Finance, and the Division of Property Assessment, along with the Secretary of State’s Office and many other state departments.

With all of these organizations bringing different strengths and knowledge to the table, our focus on the best assistance to the county governments has led us to a very good place. I hope people can continue to trust CTAS to do the right thing and serve our customers to the best of our ability, and if we can’t help them, we can point them in the right direction to solve their county issues. One of the things I’d like to do is even strengthen the relationship between CTAS and our county partners, and I believe we have over the last year and a half to almost two years ago since I began as interim Director.

TCN: How do you like to spend your free time outside of work?

J.W.: I enjoy spending time with my family, wife Angela, kids, two grandkids, one younger brother, and a great church family at Mt. Gilead Baptist Church here in Nashville. I’m a big believer in balance, and I urge the CTAS team to take as much time as they need. Our personal ambitions help motivate us to do better in our professional work, so it’s important to have and maintain that balance in all areas of life.

TCN: What are some key issues you’d like the organization to address both internally and externally as Executive Director?

J.W.: When I first took the job with CTAS, we had a lot of seasoned staff. As of December 2021, when I asked employees who’ve served in CTAS less than five years to

stand up and be recognized during our winter CTAS staff meeting, 19 out of 31 people—almost two-thirds—that were present stood up.

At first, I thought, “Wow, this [many new employees] is going to be tough.” But in reality, it’s not tough, because now we’re able to have everyone focus on what happens in the future. We can remember the past and learn from it, of course, but we’re at a point now where CTAS can take charge and lead into the future. That way, we can truly make a change and serve our county governments in better ways for today’s needs.

One of my main focuses internally is to push collaboration between different departments. How can technology help finance? How can finance help legal? You know, we have all these opportunities to understand each department’s role in the success of CTAS, and I think that understanding will help us to strengthen the organization.

A way I think we can do this is to have folks working in our Nashville office to visit field offices and see how county government consultants do their day-to-day work. This could help answer a lot of questions or bring ideas to the table that they didn’t have before when thinking about field offices and their issues. I’m excited for the future of CTAS, and I think this will be a great approach to making the overall organization better as well as its service to county officials.

I had the opportunity to play a part in writing CTAS’s vision and mission statements with several folks nearly 12 years ago now. Our vision is, “To be the leading service provider of technical assistance and training to county governments in Tennessee,” and our active mission is, “to promote better county government through direct assistance to county officials and their associations.”

I could be a little biased, but I think we’ve got the best staff that we possibly can have for this time in the history of CTAS, and I’m excited to see where the organization is headed and be part of this leadership team. I’m very blessed to be able to work with such a talented and capable group of people.

Whenever I address any county organizations, I usually say, “Thank you. Thank you for allowing us to be your technical assistance and training provider.” Because that’s essentially what we’re here for, and like I’ve said, we’ll continue to focus on providing the best possible assistance to our county officials and partners across the state.



Jonathan Walden, Executive Director of County Technical Assistance Service