

# 2023 Legislative Session: Summary of Bills Related to Strengthening Democracy and Supporting Working Families

The first year of the two-year 113th General Assembly convened on January 10th and adjourned on April 21st. The session began with the passage of bills focused on social issues -- prohibitions to gender-affirming care for minors, restrictions on drag shows, and minor amendments to last year's abortion law -- as well as those increasing state oversight of Metro Nashville and cutting the size of the Metro Council in half. However, attention quickly pivoted after The Covenant School shooting to gun reform demonstrations and the historic expulsion of two members of the House of Representatives, putting Tennessee in the national spotlight.

The session also saw discussion and passage of bills related to ThinkTN's policy priorities of **strengthening democracy** and **supporting working families**. In total, we monitored 137 bills. Of those, 31 were passed into law, including new laws that clean up election administration, enhance workplace benefits for Tennessee families, and address critical infrastructure needs across the state. Of the remaining bills that we monitored, 23 failed, 5 were withdrawn, and 78 were not calendared or were deferred until next year's session.

## KEY UPDATES

- State employees, teachers, and principals will now receive **six weeks of paid leave** after the birth or adoption of a child.
- The \$3.3 billion **Transportation Modernization Act of 2023** passed, giving the Tennessee Department of Transportation new revenue sources and project-delivery options to address critical infrastructure needs.
- Tennesseans may now apply for a **six-month reprieve before paying back court costs** other than restitution after release for a felony offense.
- Judges may now allow someone **behind on child support payments to receive a restricted driver's license**, allowing them to get to work and help contribute payments towards their debts.
- Two additional counties -- Washington and Henry -- gained permission to pilot **Convenient Vote Centers** on Election Day allowing voters to use any polling place in their county rather than their assigned precinct.
- Bills allowing sharing an **absentee ballot application** with someone who wants one, streamlining the **voting rights restoration** process, and removing **juvenile fines and fees** were introduced but did not move forward. They may return next year and we will continue to monitor their progress.

## WHAT'S INSIDE?



### STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

Highlights of bills related to:

- **Election procedures**
- **Election administration**
- **Voter registration**
- **Voting rights restoration**
- **Judicial independence**, and
- **Redistricting**.



### SUPPORTING WORKING FAMILIES

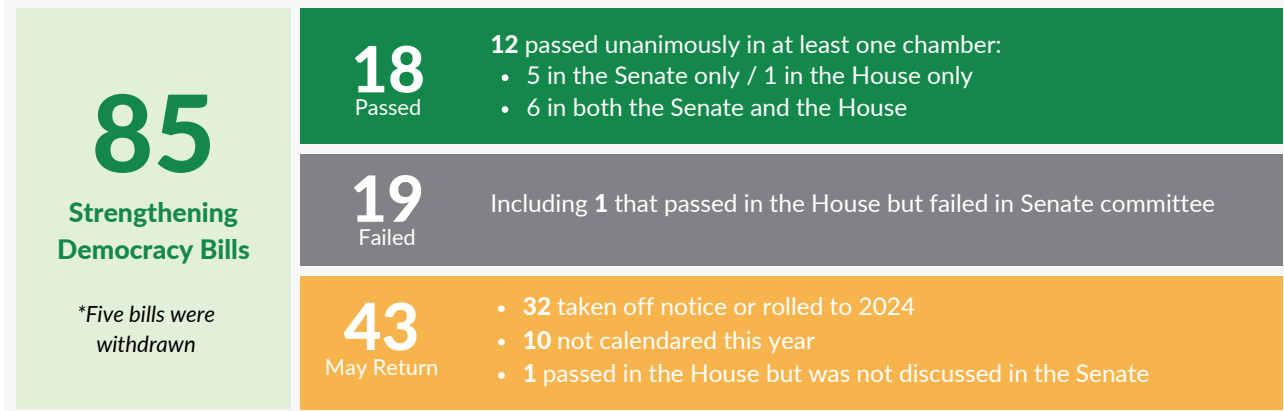
Highlights of bills related to:

- **Transportation**
- **Paid family leave**
- **Affordable childcare and housing**
- **Court fines and fees**, and
- **Driver's licenses**.



# STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

Of the **85 bills** we monitored this session, 18 passed into law and 19 failed; the majority were not discussed. For the most part, the new laws made small changes to electoral procedures with the exceptions of changes to the way Knoxville elects city council members and expanded access for voters in Washington and Henry counties.



This section includes highlights on bills related to **election procedures, election administration, voter registration, voting rights restoration, absentee voting, judicial independence, and redistricting.**

## ELECTION PROCEDURES

Most of the bills filed this session sought to change election procedures, including the timing of elections, declaring party affiliation, rules for candidates, polling places, and voter identification requirements.

### Election Timing

✓ **Changing the Timing of Local Elections:** [HJR 0013](#) (Lamberth) passed (78-15) is the first step of the process of placing a constitutional amendment on the 2026 ballot. The amendment would move local elections to an August primary and November general schedule. The sponsor presented the resolution as a way to save money (by reducing the number of elections) and increase voter turnout.

Currently, the Tennessee constitution requires county elections, e.g., for county mayors, judges, and school boards, to hold their primary in May and their general election on the first Thursday in August. This constitutional amendment would move all county-based elected offices except for the assessors of property to match the August/November election schedule of federal and state elections.[i]

The next step in the process is for the Senate to vote on the resolution next year, and then both chambers must vote on it again in the following (114th) legislative session, passing it with a two-thirds majority.[ii] If successful, the question of the constitutional amendment will be placed on the November ballot in 2026.

### POTENTIAL PATH TO MOVING THE LOCAL ELECTION CYCLE THROUGH CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT



**✗ Changing the Timing of Voting at Nursing Homes:** [HB 0871/SB 1158](#) (Lafferty/Crowe) passed the full House (73-24-1) but failed in Senate committee. The bill sought to change the timing of onsite voting performed at nursing home facilities from 29 to 27 days before Election Day. The bill's House sponsor presented it as addressing a situation where a voter could end up registering and voting on the same day under the current window.[iii] The Senate sponsor presented the bill as coming from the House, and after some committee discussion, including how little this occurs, the bill failed 3-4-2.

## Declaring Political Party

**⏸ Partisan Municipal Elections:** [HB 0561/SB 1512](#) (Todd/Southerland) would allow local parties to make municipal elections partisan. It failed with minimal discussion in the House subcommittee. However, a couple of weeks later, the bill returned under a different caption bill, [HB 0505/SB 0474](#) (Todd/Rose), and passed through House committees before being taken off notice in Finance.[iv] The bill was not discussed in the Senate.

**✗ Requiring Voters to Register by Political Party:** Two bills, [HB 0405/SB 0402](#) (Richey/Lowe) and [HB 1045/SB 1144](#) (Keisling/Hensley), sought to require Tennessee voters to register affiliation with a political party or be designated as independents and to limit participation in a party's primary to registered members.[v] Both bills failed in the House full committee and were not discussed in the Senate.

### Participation in Tennessee Primary Elections

Tennessee voters do not register by party affiliation. State law dictates that a voter may vote in a primary if:

(1) The voter is a bona fide member of and affiliated with the political party in whose primary the voter seeks to vote; or

(2) At the time the voter seeks to vote, the voter declares allegiance to the political party in whose primary the voter seeks to vote and states that the voter intends to affiliate with that party.[vi]

## Candidates

Four bills affecting candidates were introduced; one passed both chambers, two passed in the House but not the Senate, and one was rolled to next year.

**✓ New Process for Knoxville City Council Races:** [HB 0817/SB 0526](#) (Davis/Niceley) (S: 24-5-1; H: 73-20) changes the way Knoxville elects its City Councilmembers. Uniquely, Knoxville City Council candidates run in districts for primary elections with the winners running in a city-wide general election. The bill sponsors argued that candidates should run in the same district that elects them.

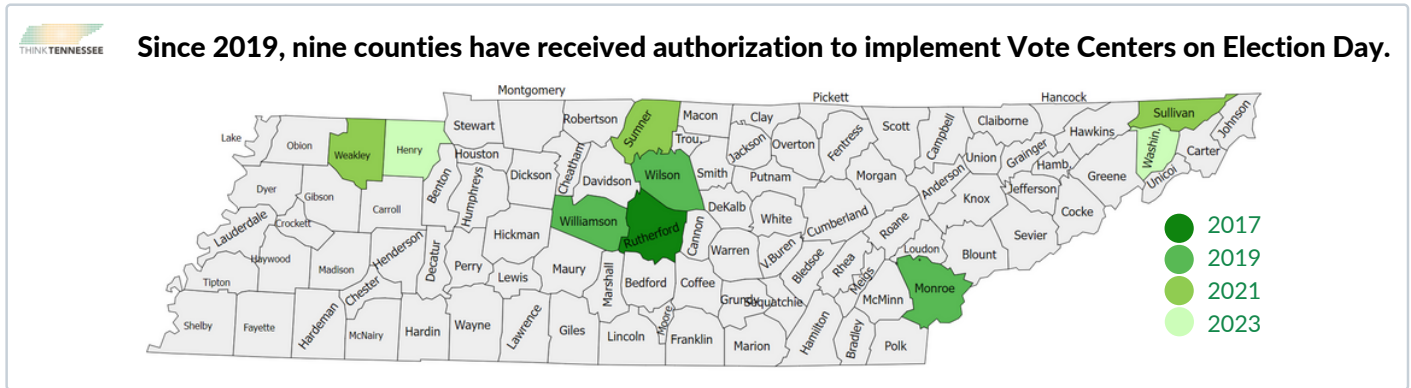
The city's director of legislative affairs testified against the bill before the Senate committee, stating that the process works for Knoxville and that the city would prefer allowing the voters to determine whether they wished the process to change.

**⏸ Independent Candidate Filing Deadline:** [HB 0636/SB 0598](#) (Barrett/Pody) passed in the House 63-34-1 but was not discussed in the Senate. The bill would allow candidates who had been excluded from a political party's ballot to qualify as an independent candidate. Currently, the deadline for filing as an independent and party candidate is the same so that a person excluded from a party ballot would not have time to file as an independent.

**✗ Out-of-State Campaign Contribution Cap:** [HB 0388/SB 0100](#) (Wright/Niceley) proposed capping the total contributions a candidate or campaign committee could accept from non-Tennessee residents at 30% of their total contributions received. It was discussed briefly in the Senate before being rolled to amend the language to only apply to primary elections but failed in the House subcommittee with no questions or discussion.

## Polling Places

Four bills were introduced related to Convenience Vote Centers (Vote Centers), three to expand the model to additional counties, and one to remove the model in Tennessee.



**Stop the Use of Vote Centers: [HB 0193/SB 1108](#)** (Barrett/Bowling) would have deleted the authorization of Vote Centers in the state. The bill did not receive a "second" and failed in Senate committee without discussion.

**Expand the Use of Vote Centers:** Three bills sought to expand the Vote Center model to two additional counties. [HB 0863/SB 1118](#) (Sherrell/Bowling) to expand the model to Washington County was withdrawn early, but a similar bill, [HB 0937/SB 0839](#) (Alexander/Crowe) (S: 30-0; H: 77-7-2), passed. [HB 0632/SB 0477](#) (Darby/Stevens) (S: 32-0, 30-0; H: 86-6-2) also passed to expand the model to Henry County.

**Polling Place Warning Sign: [HB 0828/SB 0978](#)** (Rudd/Pody) (S: 19-9; H: 55-27-1) requires polling places to have a yellow sign posted that alerts voters that they may violate Tennessee law by voting in a political party's primary if they are not affiliated with that party. The bill does not change the primary process or add additional penalties.

During primary elections, voters ask for either a Republican or Democratic party ballot to vote for the selected party's candidates. Because Tennessee voters do not register by political party, they tell poll workers which ballot they would like to use.

By selecting a party's ballot in a primary election, the voter affirms that they are either a bona fide member of and affiliated with that party or at the time the voter seeks to vote, they are declaring allegiance to that party and intend to affiliate with that party.[vii]

The bill's sponsors cited concerns of non-party members "crossing over" and voting in primaries to influence the outcomes in a way more favorable to their true party.


During committee discussion, legislators questioned how a voter becomes a bona fide member of a political party when voters do not register by party affiliation, and no clear answer was given. Committee members raised concerns that given there is no clear avenue for proving affiliation to any particular party, voters may be confused and intimidated by the language of the posted sign.

### It's the Law! Please Read...

It is a violation of Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 2-7-115(b), and punishable as a crime under Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 2-19-102 or Section 2-19-107, if a person votes in a political party's primary without being a bona fide member of or affiliated with that political party, or to declare allegiance to that party without the intent to affiliate with that party.

*New required language to be posted at polling places.*

## Voter ID


-  **Expanding Eligible Voter IDs and Messaging:** Two voter ID-related bills failed in House subcommittee. [HB 0303/SB 0285](#) (Camper/Oliver) would have authorized student ID cards from accredited in-state institutions of higher education to be used as voter IDs. While [HB 1493/SB 1017](#) (Clemmons/Campbell) sought to require state and local election officials to publish information about the availability of free, state-issued photo IDs that could be used as voter IDs. The coordinator of elections testified against the bill, arguing that it would create a chilling effect on their ability to communicate with voters.

## ELECTION ADMINISTRATION


Nearly a dozen bills filed this session dealt with elements of election administration, from voter roll maintenance and election ballots and audits, to assigning voters into districts and placing candidates on ballots.

### Voter Roll Maintenance


Three bills relating to the maintenance of voter registration rolls were introduced. Two failed in committees, and the other passed through both chambers' initial committees but did not come out of the Finance committee.

-  **Recording the Date of a Voter's Death:** [HB 0246/SB 0136](#) (Barrett/Hensley) sought to modify the process county election commissions use to remove deceased voters from the voter rolls. Currently, county election officials must remove deceased voters from their rolls at least every 30 days.[viii]

This bill would have added a requirement to record the date of a voter's death and placed new timing and reporting requirements on the coordinator of elections. Discussion of the bill indicated that a process already existed and the additional requirements would increase both state and local expenditures.[ix]


-  **Posting Purged Voters Online:** [HB 1398/SB 0716](#) (Harris/Oliver) sought to require county election commissions to post on their website within five days the list of voters who had been purged from the voter rolls.


The bill sponsors presented it as a way for voters to see that they had been purged and to get re-registered if they were eligible. But committee members and the coordinator of elections flagged questions about the sensitivity of the information and the ability of counties to post the lists -- both within the five-day timing and because some county election commissions do not have websites.

-  **Requiring Use of Certain Databases:** [HB 0835/SB 0137](#) (Richey/Hensley) passed both chambers' initial committees but became stuck in the Finance committee where it was taken off notice in the House. The bill sought to change current language from *allowing* to *requiring* the coordinator of elections to compare the voter registration database with other state agencies for purposes of removing voters who have moved or are not U.S. citizens.

### Election Ballots and Audits


Two of the four bills related to election ballot or audit processes were presented in committee, and both failed.

-  **Requiring Hand-Counting of Ballots:** [HB 1020/SB 1094](#) (Doggett/Bowling) would have required election judges to hand count and record all ballots following an election. It failed in Senate committee after not receiving a "second" to allow for discussion of the bill.


 **Authorizing the Use of a "Currency Grade" Paper Ballot:** [HB 0635/SB 0595](#) (Barrett/Pody) proposed allowing counties to use a specific hand-marked paper ballot that the coordinator of elections testified had not yet been used anywhere. Testimony in support of the bill cited concerns about voter confidence in voting machines and questions about the available options for hand-marked paper ballots.


While most Tennessee counties have been using Direct Recording Electronic (DRE) voting machines without a paper component, the legislature passed [a bill](#) last year requiring all counties to provide a voter-verified paper audit trail. For most counties, this consists of a hybrid model using an electronic voting machine with a paper component that voters may view for verification before casting and that may be used in audits. Alternatively, counties may instead use hand-marked paper ballots, which are currently used in Hamilton and Knox counties.

## Other Election Procedures


 **New Reporting Processes About "Fail Safe" Voters:** [HB 0882/SB 0854](#) (Martin, G. /Watson) (S: 32-0; H: 73-21) allows candidates to receive a list of "fail safe" voters -- those voters who have moved within the same county and whose address on their identification does not match that of their voter record. These voters can sign an affidavit at their correct polling precinct affirming their current address, and they may cast a ballot.[x]

In the event of a court-ordered recount, this bill also requires election officials to verify those addresses are correct. The Senate sponsor acknowledged that there have not been any issues reported with this process, but he viewed it as an opportunity to be preemptively addressed.

 **Assigning Voters Into Districts:** [HB 1039/SB 0760](#) (Crawford/Pody) (S: 31-0; H: 85-2) codifies the procedure for assigning voters into districts following the decennial redistricting process. Though it wasn't presented as such in committees, it appears to be in response to the challenges in Davidson County where 437 voters were mistakenly placed in the wrong district and received the wrong ballots in 2022.[xi] The coordinator of elections' report into the issue described confusion throughout the process of placing and verifying voters, and this bill outlines the steps to prevent a similar occurrence in future.[xii]

 **Elections Improvement Cleanup Act:** [HB 1254/SB 1007](#) (Keisling/Yager) passed unanimously in both chambers. Filed initially as a caption bill, it was amended to become the "Elections Improvement Cleanup Act" which updates two pieces of the election code.

The bill removes a requirement to use color paper for primary ballots, something that is no longer an option with hybrid voting machines or deemed necessary. And it removes language that allowed a voter's Social Security Number to be included in the information poll workers use to check a voter in at a polling place. Bill sponsors described the move as a personal security measure -- removing the number to protect the sensitive information.

 **Presidential Candidate Selection and State Election Commissioner Disclosures:** [HB 0772/SB 1182](#) (Rudd/Swann) (S: 26-6; H: 73-22-1) cleans up the process for placing presidential candidates on the ballot and adds a requirement for State Election Commission members to disclose any employment or receipt of fees or commissions, in-kind or otherwise, received for any services related to elections.

Uniquely, presidential candidates have been placed on the ballot by the secretary of state at their "sole discretion" based on their determination as being "generally advocated or recognized as candidates in national news media throughout the United States." [xiii] This bill instead requires the chairs of each statewide political party to certify their candidates, like they do for other races.



One bill related to voter registration passed into law, while two others failed, and one was sent to summer study.

✔ **High School Voter Registration Messaging:** [HB 0933/SB 0346](#) (McKenzie/Campbell) passed unanimously through both chambers (with 11 House members "present and not voting").

The bill requires Tennessee high schools to inform seniors that they may be eligible to vote when they reach 18 and to provide information from the secretary of state's office about eligibility and how to register to vote. It was amended in the House to specify that it is not punitive -- no measure may be taken against a school employee for failing to share the information. The Senate sponsor had a similar bill last session that passed through Senate committees but failed in the House.

✘ **Automatic Voter Registration:** [HB 0538/SB 0950](#) (Parkinson/Oliver) proposed implementing Automatic Voter Registration -- used in 23 states -- where Tennesseans would opt-out rather than opt-in to registering to vote while getting their driver's license.[xiv]

The bill's supporters cited the increased efficiency the policy would bring, while those opposed questioned the logistics, for example for people with felony convictions who can't register and for those who don't want to register for religious reasons.

✘ **Extended Voter Registration Opportunity:** [HB 0974/SB 0942](#) (Glynn/Oliver) would have reduced the number of days between the voter registration deadline and Election Day from 30 to 15. The Senate sponsor shared that this would allow Tennesseans more time to register and participate, but committee members questioned the feasibility and impact on election administrators.

Federal law requires voter-registration deadlines be set no more than 30 days before an election. However states may set it closer to Election Day. Tennessee is one of 13 states with a 29 or 30-day deadline, seven states have a deadline between one and 15 days before an election, and 22 states and D.C. allow Same Day Registration.[xv]

⏸ **Allowing the Last Four Digits of a Social Security Number:** [HB 1069/SB 0946](#) (Hemmer/Oliver) proposed removing the requirement that voters provide their full Social Security Number (SSN) on a voter registration application. The proposed bill would have instead asked for the last four digits, which would have brought Tennessee in line with most other states. After some discussion in the Senate committee about the logistics of verifying voters with just the last four digits, the committee moved the bill to summer study to develop further.

### Tennessee is One of Only Three States Requiring the full Social Security Number to Register to Vote

Most states ask for an applicant's driver's license number or the last four digits of a SSN or both. Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky are the only three to require the full SSN on a voter registration application.[xvi]



## VOTING RIGHTS AND VOTING RIGHTS RESTORATION

Seven bills on voting rights restoration were filed this session, with only three discussed in committees. Two were discussed briefly and then rolled to next year's calendar, while one on eligibility for expungement passed.

- ⏸ **Modifying the Voting Rights Restoration Process:** [HB 1166/SB 1073](#) (Glynn/Yarbro), discussed briefly in the Senate and then rolled to next year, proposed modifying the process for completing the [Certificate of Restoration](#) (COR) verifying a person's eligibility to have their rights restored after a felony conviction.

Currently, individuals must have incarcerating or pardoning officials and court clerks complete the COR to confirm their sentence is complete and restitution and court costs have been paid. This bill would change the responsibility for completing and submitting the form from the individual to the officials and clerks. A Shelby County resident was convicted in 2022 for trying to illegally register to vote after submitting a COR where one signer later determined that they had been mistaken about her probation being over.[xvii]

See ThinkTN's "[Voting With Conviction: Voting Rights and Voting Restoration in Tennessee.](#)"

- ⏸ **Modifying Eligibility Requirements:** [HB 1256/SB 1241](#) (Camper/Akbari), discussed briefly in the House and rolled to next year, proposed changing restoration eligibility. The bill would make someone eligible to have their voting rights restored upon completion of sentence and payment of restitution, deleting the requirements for first paying court costs and back-owed child support. It would also replace the permanent ban on voting as the result of certain convictions by allowing eligibility after the person had been released for three years.

During House subcommittee discussion, the bill's sponsor acknowledged working with organizations and the House majority leader on the bill's language. The majority leader expressed his interest in continuing to work with the minority leader (the bill's sponsor) over the summer on this "important subject."

- ✅ **New Eligibility to Have Voting Rights Restored:** [HB 1000/SB 1068](#) (Rudd/Hensley) (S: 19-9-2; H: 92-1) allows Tennesseans convicted of a voter registration or voter fraud felony to be eligible to apply for expungement if they have avoided further convictions for 15 years and have paid their court costs.

Voter fraud is one of the convictions for which Tennesseans are not eligible to have voting rights restored.[xviii]

- ❌ **Voting Rights for LLC Members:** [HB 0169/SB 0176](#) (Wright/Massey) sought to increase the allowed number of members of an LLC that owns property in a city who may vote in that city's municipal elections from one to up to two but failed in House subcommittee.

## ABSENTEE VOTING

Two of the four bills related to the absentee voting process were discussed briefly and then either taken off notice or rolled to next year.

- ⏸ **Removing the Felony for Sharing an Absentee Application:** [HB 0600/SB 0326](#) (Powell/Akbari) sought to remove the Class E felony penalty for giving someone the official absentee application request form which is available online. Sponsors introduced the bill in House and Senate committees and then took it off notice.

See ThinkTN's "[Enhancing Election Integrity: Allow for Sharing of Absentee Ballot Applications.](#)"



⏸ **Expanding Absentee Eligibility:** [HB 1304/SB 01052](#) (Thompson/Yarbro) was discussed in Senate committee briefly before being rolled to 2024. In Tennessee, only certain voters are eligible to request an absentee ballot. [xix] This bill would add voters who were incarcerated but not convicted of a felony to the eligibility list.

## JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE AND REDISTRICTING

### Judicial Independence

Last year, the legislature passed [HB 1832/SB 2011](#) which established a process for judicial redistricting. The process includes a task force study and report to be completed by January 1, 2027 and a requirement for the legislature to draw new districts before the 2030 judicial elections. This year, judicial redistricting came up again in discussion of two bills.

⏸ **New Plan for Judicial Redistricting:** [HB 1350/SB 0305](#) (Farmer/Lundberg) was filed as a caption bill, but the Senate sponsor indicated he intended to use the bill to implement a judicial redistricting plan -- not a task force to look into a plan. The bill was rolled to next year and not presented in either chamber.

✅ **Additional Judges for Three Districts:** [HB 0905/SB 1420](#) (Johnson, C./Roberts) (S: 23-5; H: 92-0) adds one additional judge in three judicial districts.[xx] Discussion in the Senate reflected opposition to addressing immediate needs until after a redistricting process had been undertaken. Yet supporters of the bill argued that a redistricting process would take years and these districts had already been operating understaffed for years and needed immediate solutions.

**Circuit Courts** hear civil and criminal cases and appeals of decisions from Juvenile, Municipal, and General Sessions Courts.

**Criminal Courts** were established to relieve circuit courts in areas with heavy caseloads. In addition to having jurisdiction over criminal cases, criminal court judges hear misdemeanor appeals from lower courts.[xxi]

#### HB 0905/ SB 1420 Adds Three New Judges

##### One **Circuit Court Judge** to the 19th Judicial District

Montgomery and Robertson counties

##### One **Circuit Court Judge** to the 22nd Judicial District

Giles, Lawrence, Maury and Wayne counties

##### One **Criminal Court Judge** to the 13th Judicial District

Clay, Cumberland, DeKalb, Overton, Pickett, Putnam, and White counties

✅ **Modified Process for Rulings by the Board of Judicial Conduct:** [HB 0987/SB 0944](#) (Beck/Oliver) (S: 32-0; H: 88-4) modifies the procedure for the Board of Judicial Conduct, the board responsible for regulating judicial behavior.[xxii] The bill allows those who have filed a complaint with the board to receive written notice of the board's final ruling and gives them the right to appeal the ruling to the state Supreme Court.

### Redistricting

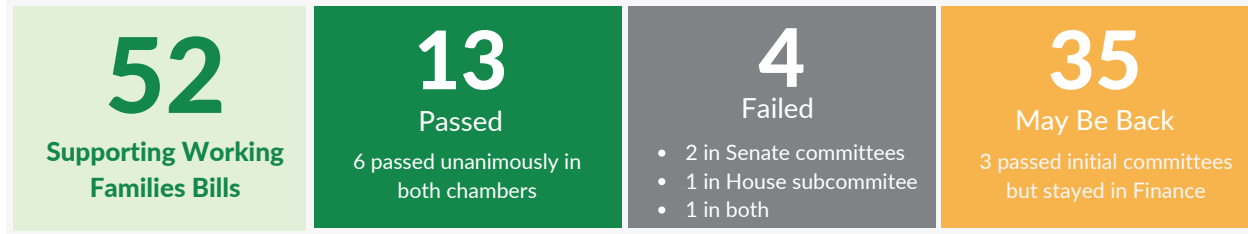
Five bills related to the legislative redistricting process were filed but not discussed. Most were caption bills filed in case they were needed, with one that was not calendared that would have required an interactive map showing the House district boundaries to be posted on the legislature's website.

⏸ **Modifying How Census Counts are Used:** [HB 1523/SB 1138](#) (Hardaway/Oliver) would impact where individuals incarcerated for less than 10 years would be counted. The bill proposed counting inmates in their home counties rather than that of the correctional institution. It passed out of Senate committees and was discussed briefly on the floor before being sent back to the Calendar committee.



## SUPPORTING WORKING FAMILIES

This session, we monitored **52 bills** related to policies impacting working families, from transportation, paid family leave, childcare, and housing to court fines and fees and driver's license suspensions. Most were not discussed, but here are highlights from those that were, including the 13 bills that passed and the four that failed.



### TRANSPORTATION

The governor introduced the Transportation Modernization Act in his February State of the State address, and it was one of the first bills the legislature took up this session.

✔ **Transportation Modernization Act: [HB 0321/SB 0273](#)** (Lamberth/Johnson) (S: 26-5; H: 78-12-3) allocates \$3.3 billion to Tennessee transportation needs and authorizes tools like public-private partnerships, choice lanes, and new project-delivery models, and enacted higher fees on electric and hybrid vehicles.

Discussion of the bill in both chambers included resistance to using choice lanes as a method to alleviate traffic and raise revenue, concerns about using non-state partners to build new roads, and frustration that the plan did not include support for public transit.

See ThinkTN's ["Electric Vehicles: Driving Tennessee's Future"](#) & ["Choice Lanes: The Right Choice to Manage Congestion."](#)

### WORKER BENEFITS: PAID FAMILY LEAVE AND SICK TIME

A handful of bills were introduced featuring paid family leave -- also prioritized by the governor in his State of the State address -- and expanding other worker benefits like use of sick leave.

#### **Paid Family Leave**

✔ **6 Weeks Paid Leave for State Employees: [HB 0324/SB 0276](#)** (Lamberth/Johnson) (S: 28-0, 26-5; H: 75-19) was introduced as providing 12 weeks of paid leave to eligible state employees for the birth or adoption of a child. [xxiii] The bill passed unanimously through the Senate committees and the full floor.

It similarly passed through initial House committees but was amended by the chair in the House Finance, Ways, and Means Committee to cut the leave from 12 to six weeks.

The full House passed the six-week version of the bill and sent it back to the Senate to concur. The Senate sponsor shared that he had conferred with the administration and then motioned for the Senate to concur to six weeks, which they did with no further discussion.

#### **New State Employee Paid Leave Benefit**

**Maternity, Paternity, & Adoption**

**6 weeks with 100% of pay, for employees who have worked at least 12 Months**

See ThinkTN's ["Paid Family Leave is Good Business for Tennessee."](#)

✔ **6 Weeks Paid Leave for Local Education Agencies:** [HB 0983/SB 1458](#) (Sexton/White) passed unanimously in both chambers and, similarly, gives teachers and principals six weeks of paid leave for the birth, adoption, or stillbirth of a child.[xxiv] It also was initially filed as 12 weeks.

✘ **Tennessee Family Insurance Act:** [HB 0673/SB 0390](#) (Johnson, G./Oliver) failed in Senate committee for lack of a “second” to discuss the bill and failed in House Banking & Consumer Affairs Subcommittee of Commerce after a brief discussion. The bill would have created the “Tennessee Family Insurance Act,” a 12-week paid family and medical leave plan available for full-time Tennessee employees by establishing an insurance fund funded entirely by employee contributions and from which employees could draw in the event of a new child or family illness.

✔ **Modified State Employee Sick Bank Usage:** [HB 1151/SB 0533](#) (White/Haile) passed unanimously in both chambers and allows state employees participating in the sick leave bank to use the time to care for a sick minor child. State employees who contribute four days of their sick leave are able to draw from the bank if they need additional time. Previously they were not allowed to use the time to cover a child’s illness.

## CHILDCARE

Three bills addressed what legislators acknowledged as a “childcare crisis” by seeking to expand the availability of affordable childcare programs in the state.

See ThinkTN's ["Affordable, High-Quality Childcare Will Benefit Tennessee's Families and Improve Educational Outcomes."](#)

✔ **Childcare Improvement Fund:** [HB 0634/SB 0543](#) (Moody/Jackson) passed unanimously in both chambers and establishes the “Childcare Improvement Fund,” a three-year, \$15 million grant program administered by the Department of Human Services to establish new, and support existing, childcare agencies and programs.


⏸ **Workers Need Childcare Act:** [HB 1336/SB 1053](#) (Camper/Yarbro) sought to create a very similar “Workers Need Childcare Act” establishing a childcare infrastructure fund to be allocated by the Department of Human Services to support new childcare agencies. During Senate committee discussion, some members acknowledged a childcare crisis though some questioned whether it was the role of government to solve. The bill passed into the Finance committee in both chambers but did not receive funding.

⏸ **Early Care and Learning Scholarship Program:** [HB 0875/SB 0750](#) (White/Massey), a bipartisan bill that would create a “Promising Futures” scholarship program similar to the HOPE and Promise programs for high school students but targeting early education passed through committees in both chambers and was sent to Finance committees. It did not receive funding in the governor's budget and has been rolled to the first calendar of next year in the House where discussion will continue. The bill's sponsors presented it as an opportunity to address both early childhood literacy and the need for affordable childcare options for Tennessee families.

## HOUSING


Two bills -- one successful and one stalled in Finance -- sought to address affordable housing in Tennessee.

✔ **TACIR Study on Affordable Housing:** [HJR 0139](#) (Sparks) passed unanimously in the House. The resolution calls on the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) to look at the correlation between home affordability and impact fees. The resolution’s sponsor shared that he was open to having TACIR explore additional ideas about how to tackle the issue.


-  **Tennessee Rural and Workforce Housing Act: [HB 1046/SB 1000](#)** (Vaughan/Yager) passed through to the Finance committees in both chambers but did not receive funding. Described as mirroring the federal tax credit program initiated by President Reagan, it would create the "Tennessee Rural and Workforce Housing Act," giving tax credits to owners and developers of eligible properties with at least 60% of their units available for Tennesseans with less than the median income.


## COURT FINES AND FEES

One bill dealing with court fines and fees passed, one was discussed briefly then taken off notice, and another was filed but not discussed in committees this year.

-  **Six-Month Pause Before Making Payments on Court Costs: [HB 0026/SB 0013](#)** (Faison/Gardenhire) (S: 29-0; H: 89-1) allows those being released from incarceration to apply for a six-month reprieve before starting to pay their assessed court costs (not including restitution).

Currently, individuals must immediately begin paying their debt, though they may be able to establish a payment plan. The bill's sponsors stated that allowing the extra time would help individuals to find work and better position themselves to be able to start making payments.


-  **[HB 0546/SB 0875](#)** (Harris/Akbari) proposed the exact same measure and was discussed briefly in House subcommittee before being taken off notice.

-  **Removing Juvenile Fines and Fees:** Last session, the legislature considered a bill that would have eliminated fines and fees from juvenile court cases.[xxv] The issue returned this year with [HB 0749/SB 0889](#) (Powell/Akbari) but was not discussed in committees. The bill proposed streamlining the process of determining indigency and exempting those determined indigent from fines and fees.


See ThinkTN's "[Eliminating Juvenile Fines and Fees in Tennessee.](#)"


## DRIVER'S LICENSES

Three bills related to driver's licenses -- revocations due to back-owed child support, waiving fees for youth in the custody of the Department of Children's Services, and helping those leaving incarceration to obtain identification documents -- all passed into law.

-  **Restricted Rather than Revoked Licenses: [HB 1225/SB 0880](#)** (Lamberth/Akbari) (S: 30-3; H: 89-0, 94-0-1), a bipartisan bill, lets judges use their discretion and allow someone who has fallen behind on child support to get a restricted driver's license whereas previously their license would have been revoked.

See ThinkTN's "[Reducing the Harms of Court Debt: Driver's License Revocations are an Ineffective Policy for Increasing Court Collections.](#)"

-  **Fees Waived for Children in DCS Custody: [HB 0929/SB 0897](#)** (McKenzie/Akbari) (S: 32-0; H: 68-13-3) waives the fees for getting or renewing driver's licenses for children in the custody of the Department of Children's Services. The bill's sponsors presented it as an opportunity to remove one potential challenge facing these youth and to help them obtain employment.

-  **TDOC Help in Obtaining Identification Documents: [HB 1366/SB 0814](#)** (Farmer/Gardenhire) passed unanimously in both chambers and requires the Tennessee Department of Corrections to help those leaving incarceration to access documents like a driver's license, birth certificate, and social security card to help them obtain employment. While discussed as something that already is being done, this bill codifies the act and was not questioned or discussed at length in either chamber.

- [i] The resolution was amended to exclude the assessors of property whose elections will remain in August. In presenting the bill to the House Local Government Committee, the House sponsor noted the exception was needed because assessors of property elections on are on the off years and do not align with the other offices.
- [ii] TN Const art XI §3.
- [iii] Tennessee's voter-registration deadline is 30 days before Election Day. However, the federal holiday of Columbus Day may sometimes align with that deadline, extending the window for an additional day (29 days before Election Day).
- [iv] The chair of the House Elections & Campaign Finance Subcommittee said that there had been confusion during the vote on the previous bill (that failed), and he had turned one of his caption bills over to the sponsor to use to bring the bill again. March 22, 2023 House Elections & Campaign Finance Subcommittee hearing.
- [v] HB 1045/SB 1144 would have allowed parties to decide to allow unaffiliated voters to participate in their primaries.
- [vi] Tennessee Code Annotated § 2-7-115(b).
- [vii] Tennessee Code Annotated § 2-7-115(b).
- [viii] Tennessee Code Annotated § 2-2-133(d). County election officials receive reports at least monthly from the coordinator of elections who receives reports from multiple sources, including monthly from the state Office of Vital Records of the Department of Health and annually from the federal Social Security Administration master death file. Tennessee Code Annotated §§2-2-133(a)(b).
- [ix] Tennessee General Assembly. (March 18, 2023). Fiscal Note SB 136-HB 246. *See* <http://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/113/Fiscal/SB0136.pdf>.
- [x] Tennessee Code Annotated § 2-7-140(c).
- [xi] Kreusi, Kimberlee, and Jonathan Matisse. (November 7, 2022). AP News. Number of Wrong Ballots Cast in Nashville Now More Than 430. *See* <https://apnews.com/article/tennessee-nashville-government-and-politics-d3f56e71cc9007f53d692d3a904d2ca0>.
- [xii] Report of the Coordinator of Elections Regarding Misassigned Voters in Davidson County, Tennessee. *See* <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/23559469/tennessee-review-of-nashville-voting-issues.pdf>.
- [xiii] Tennessee Code Annotated § 2-5-205(a)(1).
- [xiv] National Conference of State Legislatures. (February 7, 2023). Automatic Voter Registration. *See* <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/automatic-voter-registration#:~:text=Twenty%2Dtwo%20states%20and%20Washington,or%20implemented%20automatic%20voter%20registration>.
- [xv] Montana is included as a "Same Day Registration" state although they passed a new law moving the deadline to the day before Election Day. It is the subject of an ongoing lawsuit. National Conference of State Legislatures. (February 10, 2023). Voter Registration Deadlines. *See* <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/voter-registration-deadlines>.
- [xvi] South Carolina asks for the full SSN but notes that the last four will be accepted.
- [xvii] Bella, Timothy. (February 4, 2022). The Washington Post. She Was Told She Could Vote Again After Felony Convictions. Now She's in Prison For Trying. *See* <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/02/04/tennessee-pamela-moses-voting-fraud-prison/>.
- [xviii] Tennessee Secretary of State. Eligibility to Vote After a Felony Conviction. *See* <https://sos-prod.tnsosgovfiles.com/s3fs-public/document/Eligibility%20to%20Vote%20after%20Felony%20Conviction.pdf?VersionId=gCtoxcl6yXFw.fFtuZ8u8NcCSJh08ANU>.
- [xix] Tennessee Code Annotated § 2-6-201.
- [xx] The bill creates three new judges in four districts: one criminal court judge in district 13, one circuit court judge in district 19, and one circuit court judge in district 22.
- [xxi] Tennessee State Courts. About the Trial Courts. *See* <https://www.tncourts.gov/courts/circuit-criminal-chancery-courts/about#:~:text=CIRCUIT%20COURTS,-Circuit%20Courts%20are&text=Circuit%20court%20judges%20hear%20civil,that%20of%20the%20chancery%20courts>.
- [xxii] Tennessee State Courts. Board of Judicial Conduct. *See* <https://www.tncourts.gov/board-of-judicial-conduct>.
- [xxiii] The bill also makes additional changes to the way time off is allotted to state employees and to matches for dental and long-term disability benefits. Eligible state employees include those employed for at least 12 consecutive months with the state executive branch; all boards, commissions, and agencies of state government; the judicial branch, including the administrative office of the courts; the office of the attorney general and reporter; the offices of district attorneys general and district public defenders; the Tennessee higher education commission and all employees; employees of the Tennessee advisory commission on intergovernmental relations; the Tennessee housing development agency and employees; and employees of Tennessee rehabilitative initiative in correction board.
- [xxiv] Eligible employees include teachers, principals, supervisors, or other individuals required by law to hold a valid license or qualification for employment in a local education agency and who has been employed full-time for at least 12 consecutive months.
- [xxv] Tennessee General Assembly. (2022). HB 2307/SB 2172. *See* <https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/Billinfo/default.aspx?BillNumber=HB2307&ga=112>.