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Special Rules for County Commissioners who are County Employees

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the CTAS electronic library known as e-Li. This online library is maintained daily by CTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee county government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with county government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other e-Li material.

Sincerely,

The University of Tennessee
County Technical Assistance Service
226 Capitol Blvd. Suite 400
Nashville, TN. 37219
615-532-3555 phone
615-532-3699 fax
ctas@tennessee.edu
www.ctas.tennessee.edu

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Special Rules for County Commissioners who are County Employees

Reference Number: CTAS-625

Countywide officeholders, such as the county mayor, sheriff, trustee, register, county clerk, or assessor of property, are statutorily prohibited from being nominated for or elected to membership in the county legislative body. T.C.A. § 5-5-102. However, county employees may hold the office of county legislative body member. Any county employee who is otherwise qualified may serve as a member of the county legislative body, notwithstanding the fact that such person is a county employee. T.C.A. § 5-5-102.

In 2016, the Legislature enacted Public Chapter 1072, effective May 20, 2016. This new law changes the conflict of interest provisions for county commissioners who are county employees or whose spouses are county employees. Pursuant to the new law, no member of the county legislative body who is also an employee of the same county or whose spouse is an employee of the same county may vote on matters in which the member has a conflict of interest. The new law provides that a conflict of interest is created when a member is voting on a matter which, if approved by the legislative body, would increase the pay or benefits of that member or that member's spouse. However, the new law does not prohibit a member from voting on the budget, appropriation resolution, or tax rate resolution, or amendments thereto, unless the vote is on a specific amendment to the budget or a specific appropriation or resolution in which the member has a conflict of interest. A member who abstains from voting for cause on any issue coming to a vote before the body is not counted for the purpose of determining a majority vote. These new provisions have been codified as T.C.A. § 5-5-112.

2016 PUBLIC CHAPTER 1072

Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 5, Chapter 5, Part 1, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

(a) No member of the legislative body of a county who is also an employee of the same county or whose spouse is an employee of the same county may vote on matters in which such member has a conflict of interest. A conflict of interest is created under this section when a member is voting on a matter which, if approved by the legislative body, would increase the pay or benefits of that member or that member's spouse. The vote of any member having a conflict of interest shall be void if challenged in a timely manner. As used in this subsection (a), "timely manner" means during the same meeting at which the vote was cast and prior to the transaction of any further business by the body.

(b) Subsection (a) shall not prohibit a member of a local governing body of a county from voting on the budget, appropriation resolution, or tax rate resolution, or amendments thereto, unless the vote is on a specific amendment to the budget or a specific appropriation or resolution in which the member has a conflict of interest.

(c) Any member of a local governing body of a county who abstains from voting for cause on any issue coming to a vote before the body shall not be counted for the purpose of determining a majority vote. This subsection (c) shall not apply to any county having a metropolitan form of government and having a population in excess of five hundred thousand (500,000), according to the 1990 federal census or any subsequent federal census.

(d) Nothing in this section alters, amends, or otherwise affects § 12-4-101(a). In the event of any conflict between this section and § 12-4-101(a), § 12-4-101(a) shall prevail.

(e) The legislative body of any metropolitan form of government or charter form of government may opt out of this section by resolution.

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