



CAMPAIGN FINANCE

For State and Local Candidates

Below is a brief summary of the campaign finance statutes for state and local candidates.

The purpose of this summary is to make potential candidates aware of their responsibilities under the campaign finance statutes. For more complete info please go to our website (www.tn.gov/tref), speak with your Administrator of Elections (AOE), e-mail the Registry of Election Finance (Registry) (registry.info@tn.gov) or call the Registry (615.741.7959).

Who

Any individual who becomes a candidate. A candidate is defined as an individual who:

- Makes a formal announcement of candidacy for office;
- Has qualified to seek office;
- Accepts contributions or makes expenditures to determine if one shall be a candidate(except for incidental expenditures); or
- Establishes a campaign committee to accept contributions or make expenditures to seek election.

What

Appointment of Treasurer Statement. A candidate must file an Appointment of Political Treasurer Statement with the appropriate office before they may receive contributions or make expenditures. All campaign funds must be maintained in a bank or credit union insured by the FDIC or NCUA.

Campaign Financial Disclosure Statements. Candidates must file periodic campaign financial disclosure reports detailing their campaign contributions and expenditures unless they are exempt as described below.

Exempt. A local candidate is exempt from the filing requirements if he or she is seeking an office for which the service is part-time and the compensation is less than \$1,000 per month. This exemption does not apply if the candidate spends more than \$1,000 seeking the office or if the office being sought is mayor or chief administrative officer.

When

Periodic campaign financial disclosure reports are due based on the date of the election(s). The Registry posts on its website (www.tn.gov/tref) the filing dates for state elections and many common local elections. Local candidates should contact their AOE for filing dates.

Where

State candidates file campaign financial disclosure reports electronically with the Registry. Local candidates file campaign financial disclosure reports on paper with their county election commission office. Candidates will receive a notice from either the Registry (**via email**) or county election commission before a report is due. **State candidates should make sure that their email address is up to date with the Registry at all times.**

Information Required on Campaign Financial Disclosure Statements

Short Form. A candidate receiving \$1,000 or less and spending \$1,000 or less during a reporting period may file a short form. The only financial information required on a short form is balance on hand, loan balance and obligation balance.

Long Form. A candidate who does not meet the requirements to file a short form must file a disclosure detailing their contributions, in-kind contributions, expenditures, loans and obligations (see below for details).

Contributions. Contributions are monies (including a candidate's personal funds) or things of value received for the purpose of the election of any person to public office. Non-monetary contributions such as a donation of supplies are called in-kind contributions. Anonymous contributions may not be accepted.

Contributions totaling \$100 or less from a single source, up to a maximum of \$2,000, during the reporting period are not required to be itemized. They may be totaled with other single source contributions totaling \$100 or less and be reported

as a single item. Any contributions totaling \$100 or less from a single source in excess of the \$2,000 maximum must be itemized. Contributions totaling more than \$100 from a single source during a reporting period are required to itemized. Each itemized contribution must list the contributor's full name, complete address, occupation, and employer. In addition, the amount, date of receipt, and election the contribution is designated for must be listed.

Expenditures. Expenditures are defined as any purchase, payment, distribution, loan, advance, deposit or gift of money or anything of value made for the purpose of influencing the election of any person to public office. All expenditures must be itemized. Each expenditure must list the payee's full name and complete address along with the amount and purpose of the expenditure.

Loans. Campaign loans must be disclosed by a candidate during the reporting period that the loan is received. A loan must continue to be disclosed on future campaign financial disclosure statements until the loan is paid back in full or a statement has been filed stating the loan will not be repaid and is to be considered a contribution to the campaign.

Obligations. Goods and services received on credit which are not paid for during the reporting period received must be disclosed as an obligation by the candidate during the reporting period that the obligation is incurred. The obligation must continue to be disclosed by the candidate or committee until fully paid. (Any unpaid debts may be deemed a contribution to your campaign, which must be within contribution limits.)

Contribution Limits

There are limits on how much a person or a PAC may contribute (monetary and in-kind) to a candidate's campaign per election (primary, general and run-off are considered separate elections) and how much monies that a candidate may accept for an election from a person or PAC. The limits for 2025/2026 are as follows:

| Office | Person | PAC | Total Contributions from PACs (Excluding PACs controlled by a political party*) |
|--------------------------------------|---------|----------|---|
| Statewide | \$5,300 | \$15,400 | 50% of contributions |
| State Senate | \$1,900 | \$30,800 | \$253,200 |
| State Rep | \$1,900 | \$15,400 | \$126,600 |
| All other State and Local Candidates | \$1,900 | \$10,100 | \$126,600 |

*A "PAC controlled by a political party" includes any PAC created, controlled, financed, and maintained by a political party organization on the national, state or local level, and caucuses of a political party established by members of either house of the General Assembly. T.C.A. § 2-10-302. As of May 9, 2025, these PACs are not subject to contribution limits; however, a PAC that is associated with a political party or a caucus but not directly established, financed, maintained or controlled by a political party or caucus remains subject to the PAC contribution limits at T.C. A. § 2-10-302(b) and (c). For a list of PACs controlled by a political party, please contact the Registry of Election Finance.

A candidate may not accept more than \$50 in cash contributions from a single person per election. Candidates must collect contributor data relating to ALL contributions received.

Prohibited Uses of Campaign Funds

A candidate for an elected public office is prohibited from using any campaign funds prior to, during or after an election for the candidate's own personal use. Personal use is defined as any use of funds that would require the candidate or official to treat the use as gross income under Section 61 of the IRS Code of 1986. T.C.A. § 2-10-114(b)(1). There are other specific uses of campaign funds that are prohibited. They may be found on the Registry website in the Candidate FAQs.

Failure to File Required Reports and Violating Other Campaign Finance Statutes

The Registry has the authority to impose civil penalties of up to \$10,000 for late filing or failure to file required campaign financial disclosure reports. The Registry also has the authority to impose civil penalty of up to \$10,000 or 115% of the amount of all contributions made or accepted in excess of the limitations of the Act, whichever is greater.