



NEWS UPDATE



Big News: Harris Frazier Government Relations Becomes HBS Tennessee in Nashville!

We are excited to announce that Harris Frazier Government Relations has joined forces with Husch Blackwell Strategies (HBS), establishing HBS's presence in Tennessee as their 11th state capital office. Estie Harris and Meagan Frazier will lead the HBS Tennessee office, continuing their legacy as trusted advocates for clients and lawmakers alike.



“We are thrilled to join the HBS team and believe that the firm’s reach, credibility and commitment to clients aligns with our team’s values and will ensure a seamless transition.”

- Estie Harris, Managing Principal



“With the HBS national footprint, we can effectively open new fronts in public policy and media that could benefit our clients and their interests beyond Tennessee.”

- Meagan Frazier, Managing Principal

[Read the Full Announcement here](#)

New Email Addresses

As part of this transition, the team will now use @hbstrategies.us email addresses. Please update your records:

- Estie Harris: eharris@hbstrategies.us
- Meagan Frazier: mfrazier@hbstrategies.us

- McCasland Podlesney: mpodlesney@hbstrategies.us
- Merle Franklin: mfranklin@hbstrategies.us
- Macy Provance: interntn@hbstrategies.us

We're looking forward to continuing to deliver results under the HBS banner!

About Husch Blackwell Strategies

Husch Blackwell Strategies (HBS) is a leading national bipartisan advocacy firm with one of the most extensive networks of state lobbyists in the country. With capital offices in Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, Wisconsin, and now Tennessee, HBS provides comprehensive state-level representation. Its Federal Government Affairs team, recognized as one of Washington's top-performing lobbying groups, includes a leadership strategies practice headed by U.S. Senator Roy Blunt.



The General Assembly will reconvene at 12:00 noon (CST) on Tuesday, January 14, 2025. In addition to its typical organizational meetings, the legislature will meet in joint sessions a few times. The opening week will focus on administrative tasks, such as reviewing the audits and operations of the Comptroller of the Treasury and the

State Treasurer, office reassignments, committee restructuring, and setting the stage for the session's work.

The 114th General Assembly will have 27 Republicans in the Senate with six Democratic members. The House of Representatives has 75 Republicans and 24 Democratic members.

Mentionable Dates

- Wednesday, January 15th is the election of the Constitutional Officers.
- Thursday, February 6th is the tentative bill filing deadline for the House.
- Friday, January 17th through Monday, January 20th is recess.

To view updated legislative calendars and agendas, visit [Capitol.Tn.Gov](https://capitol.tn.gov).

Lawmakers face a wide range of priorities this session, from managing a mixed economic outlook to tackling significant policy challenges. Here's a closer look at the key issues that will shape the months ahead:

Economy: Balancing Growth and Caution

Tennessee's economy slowed in 2023, growing by just 1.9%, in line with national trends of reduced consumer spending and moderate job growth. However, projections for 2024 and 2025 are more optimistic, with real GDP expected to grow by 2.4% and 2.5%, respectively.

Despite this positive outlook, revenue estimates for FY24-25 indicate a possible shortfall of 1.91–2.5%. Governor Lee plans to base his next budget proposal on a cautious recurring revenue growth estimate of 1–2%, as recommended by the State Funding Board. Thanks to Tennessee's strong financial management and the potential for a one-time cash infusion, the state is well-positioned to balance funding priorities while maintaining fiscal stability.

KEY LEGISLATIVE TOPICS

1. **Private School Vouchers**

Gov. Bill Lee's long-anticipated private school voucher program is likely to take center stage in 2025. Senate and House GOP leadership are aligned on key legislative details, making passage more plausible than in 2024. However, opposition from rural lawmakers who fear adverse effects on public schools could complicate efforts. Early pushes are expected, but failure in committee could signal ongoing challenges for school choice initiatives.

2. **Disaster Relief**

Communities in Northeast Tennessee continue to recover from Hurricane Helene, which left many without homes. In October, Gov. Lee announced \$100M in emergency loans, including \$35M for infrastructure repairs and \$65M for debris removal. Additional relief may depend on legislative reallocations, particularly if federal funding delays persist. Rumors of a special session have circulated, but leadership suggests relief could proceed during regular budget negotiations.

3. **Grocery Tax Elimination**

Efforts to eliminate Tennessee's 4% grocery tax are gaining bipartisan traction. HB 21, sponsored by Rep. Elaine Davis (R-Knoxville), has strong Republican backing but would cost \$800M annually. Democrats propose offsetting the revenue loss with corporate taxes, an idea opposed by GOP leaders. Budget discussions will center on balancing the tax cut's benefits with its financial impact, as Senate Republicans remain noncommittal.

4. **Farmland Preservation**

Development pressures continue to threaten Tennessee's agricultural lands, prompting renewed interest in farmland preservation. Gov. Lee's proposed fund would compensate farmers for preserving their land instead of selling to developers. The measure passed the House last year but stalled in the Senate, leaving hopes for progress in 2025 as urbanization challenges intensify.

5. **Transportation Funding**

Hurricane Helene's \$510M damage to Tennessee infrastructure has placed significant stress on TDOT's budget. While \$32M in federal aid has been secured, a \$478M gap remains. TDOT is also requesting \$300M annually from the general fund to maintain roads and bridges, marking a shift from reliance on fuel taxes. Lawmakers are expected to debate innovative solutions to sustain infrastructure without undermining fiscal stability.

6. Franchise Tax Reforms

Franchise tax changes implemented in 2024 have reduced annual revenues by \$400M and required \$1.5B in refunds due to a three-year lookback period. Approximately \$225M in refunds remain unclaimed, and lawmakers will consider whether these funds should be reserved for disaster relief, reinvested, or redirected to other priorities during budget negotiations.

7. Broadband Expansion

High-speed internet remains a top priority for Tennessee, with \$813M from the federal BEAD program available to close connectivity gaps in underserved areas. Legislators must allocate funds to maximize impact while balancing competing priorities. Broadband policy could see renewed focus with new committee leadership shaping the discussion.

8. Artificial Intelligence

The Tennessee AI Advisory Council, established in 2024, is tasked with crafting a strategic plan for leveraging AI in government operations and economic growth. Lawmakers are expected to engage in early discussions about opportunities and challenges in AI adoption, including workforce implications and safeguarding public trust, as the council's first report is due in May.

9. Nuclear Energy Investments

Tennessee is advancing its status as a leader in nuclear innovation. Legislation will likely build on recommendations from the Nuclear Energy Advisory Council, including incentives for supply chain development, exploration of Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), and workforce initiatives to align with industry needs. This push underscores Tennessee's ambitions to become a hub for advanced energy solutions.

10. IVF and Abortion Restrictions

Tennessee's abortion ban continues to spark debate two years after its enactment. Lawmakers are divided over proposals to protect access to in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and contraception versus stricter measures like banning IVF altogether. Sen. Raumesh Akbari (D-Memphis) and Rep. Harold Love (D-Nashville) propose safeguarding IVF and contraception, while Rep. Gino Bulso (R-Brentwood) advocates lawsuits against abortion pill distributors, reflecting the polarized nature of this issue.

11. Property Tax Caps

Proposals to cap local property tax increases are gaining momentum,

reflecting concerns about affordability amid rapid growth in urban areas. While these caps could benefit homeowners, critics warn they may hinder funding for schools, infrastructure, and essential services. Alternative revenue sources may emerge as lawmakers attempt to balance fiscal responsibility with voter demands.

EMERGING PRIORITIES AND LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

- **Disaster Preparedness and Recovery**

Hurricane Helene underscored the importance of proactive disaster planning. Beyond TDOT's funding needs, the state must address broader recovery efforts, including housing, community rebuilding, and long-term infrastructure resilience.

- **Education and Workforce Development**

Tennessee's commitment to workforce readiness will remain a focus, with potential investments in career and technical education, community colleges, and job training programs to meet industry demand.

- **Healthcare Access and Innovation**

Healthcare policy, particularly rural access and innovation, may feature prominently as lawmakers seek to address gaps in care and explore cost-saving measures through telehealth and other emerging technologies.

Stay Updated

As the session progresses, we'll provide timely updates on the most impactful legislative developments. From budget debates to policy proposals, our team will keep you informed and engaged. If you have specific questions or need assistance navigating the session, don't hesitate to reach out.

'DON'T TREAD ON ME'

TOPS TENNESSEE SPECIALTY
PLATES

'IN THE BLACK'

RISES TO NO. 2



Tennessee's specialty license plates continue to generate significant funds for nonprofits, with the "Don't Tread on Me" plate retaining its top spot for the third consecutive year, selling 38,378 plates and raising \$657,700 for Friends of Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park. The all-black "In the Black" plate, benefiting the Millennial Debt Foundation's efforts to reduce national debt, climbed to second place with 36,100 plates sold, generating \$571,395. Other popular plates supporting causes like the Great Smoky Mountains and agriculture also ranked high, showcasing the state's passion for advocacy through personalized plates.

[READ MORE](#)

NEW MVR REQUIREMENT FOR LICENSE TRANSFERS FROM EIGHT STATES BEGINS TODAY

RESIDENTS FROM EIGHT NON-S2S STATES MUST PROVIDE A RECENT MOTOR VEHICLE RECORD FOR TENNESSEE LICENSE APPLICATIONS.



As of today, January 10, 2025, Tennessee requires new or returning residents transferring a driver license from California, Connecticut, Illinois, Kentucky, Nevada, Oklahoma, Vermont, or West Virginia to present a Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) from their previous state. The MVR must be issued within 30 days of application and submitted alongside other necessary documents. This requirement applies only to states not participating in the State-to-State (S2S) Verification Service, which streamlines driver history sharing. For details, visit tn.gov/safety/driver-services.html

[PRESS RELEASE](#)

IN THE NEWS

- **School vouchers and grocery tax proposals return**

Lawmakers are set to reconvene in Nashville on Jan. 14 for the annual months-long process of examining proposals from colleagues and determining which bills would become law.

WBIR.COM

- **New Tennessee bill would allow Ten Commandments to be placed in public schools**

A Tennessee representative has filed a bill to allow the Ten Commandments, along with other texts, to be displayed in public schools across the state.

TENNESSEAN.COM - Jan. 03, 2025

- **Vouchers, Immigration and Reproductive Rights to Remain Top Issues in Tennessee Legislature**

The upcoming session of the Tennessee General Assembly will likely mirror recent years with an emphasis on school vouchers, immigration and reproductive rights.

NASHVILLEBANNER.COM - Jan. 03, 2025

- **New 'blended sentencing' law in Tennessee goes into effect, provides additional options to juveniles facing punishment**

A new Tennessee sentencing law sponsored by Senator Brent Taylor (R-Memphis) is going into effect January 2025, looking to crack down on crime and provide additional options to juvenile offenders facing punishment.

LOCALMEMPHIS.COM - Jan. 02, 2025

- ***Tennessee lawmakers propose PEACE Act to counter rising hate crimes in the Midstate***

Lawmakers are working to combat hate crimes in Tennessee after groups of self-proclaimed Neo-Nazis marched through Nashville last year.

[NEWSCHANNEL9.COM](https://www.newschannel9.com) - Jan. 03, 2025

- ***Gov. Lee appears in advertisement to push school voucher bill ahead of legislative session***

Gov. Bill Lee is taking his push for school vouchers straight to Tennesseans' televisions ahead of the upcoming legislative session.

[WKRN.COM](https://www.wkrn.com) - Jan. 02, 2025

- ***Tennessee Republican leadership file bill on election laws, temporary driver's licenses***

A new bill filed Tuesday would require election commissions and the Tennessee Secretary of State to team up to ensure those registering to vote are eligible to participate.

[NEWSCHANNEL5.COM](https://www.newschannel5.com) - Jan. 08, 2024