

Claiborne County TN insights  
into  
**CITIZEN DRIVEN COUNTY  
GOVERNMENT**

Quick Course ONE

Brought to you by:  
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# BACKGROUND

*Where does the citizen start ?*

**KNOW or be familiar with TN STATE County Legislations....**

Tennessee county legislation is governed by the state General Assembly, granting county legislative bodies authority for property taxes, zoning, and public services, often through public or private acts. Counties are considered political subdivisions, with powers limited to those expressly authorized by state law. Current 2025-2026 legislation covers education, tax-funded projects, and law enforcement reporting.

# KEY AREAS & POWERS

## Key Legislative Areas & Powers

- **Authority Source:** Counties must find authority in the [Tennessee Code Annotated](#) (TCA) for actions.
- **Governmental Structure:** Governed by elected county commissioners. **Chartered counties can pass local ordinances.**
- **Finances/Taxes:** Counties have broad authority to levy property taxes, local option sales tax, and motor vehicle privilege taxes.
- **Services:** Authorized to operate K-12 education, maintain roads/bridges, manage landfills, and operate jails.

<https://www.ctas.tennessee.edu/eli/county-legislative-body#:~:text=The%20county%20legislative%20body%20may,a%20consolidated%20city/county%20government.>

# RECENT & PENDING (2025-2026)

## Recent & Pending Legislation (2025-2026)

- **Education:** "Education Freedom Act of 2025" and "Family Right to Educational Emancipation (FREE) Act" propose new schooling options.
- **Law Enforcement:** New reporting requirements for law enforcement regarding individuals not lawfully present in the U.S. and for towing companies regarding vehicle impoundment.
- **Licensing & Revenue:** New specialty license plates and changes to county clerk services for registration, as outlined in 2025 Legislative Summaries.
- **Agriculture:** "Pot for Potholes Act" introduced for cannabis regulation.

# DISCUSSION

- Why does the county citizen need to understand State County Legislative powers? vs. other alternative powers.
- Why does the citizen need to know economic status of its community in relation to county government?
- If the citizen is unaware of County Legislation and Stas who benefits from the citizen “not knowing” ?

# DISCUSSION ONE

## WHY DO WE NEED TO KNOW COUNTY LEGISLATION?

**Understanding Tennessee state and county legislation is indeed crucial for citizens who wish to actively participate in local governance and decision-making processes.**

- **By familiarizing themselves with the Tennessee Code Annotated and local ordinances, residents can better comprehend how laws impact various aspects of their lives, such as taxes, education, and zoning regulations.**
- **This knowledge empowers them to engage meaningfully in public meetings, as stipulated by the Open Meetings Act, ensuring transparency and accountability in government actions.**
- **Furthermore, being aware of their rights under state laws allows citizens to advocate for change, contribute to local planning efforts, and ensure their voices are heard in shaping the future of their communities.**
- **Access to public records also plays a vital role in holding officials accountable and fostering a well-informed citizenry capable of influencing local policies and initiatives.**

# DISCUSSION ONE

## WHY DO WE NEED TO KNOW COUNTY LEGISLATION?

- **Protect Rights & Influence Policy:** Understanding "Sunshine Laws" allows citizens to attend meetings and access public records for school boards, city councils, and county commissions. Citizens can also contact representatives before votes, a process aided by required 48-hour advanced agendas.
- **Understand Taxing & Services:** County governments in Tennessee provide local funding for K-12 education and set property taxes, which are subject to legislative approval. Local ordinances, such as zoning regulations in unincorporated areas, directly affect land use and development.
- **Local Control via Charter:** Citizens can be involved in adopting county "home rule" charters to determine local officials' terms, set local policy, and address rapid population growth issues like infrastructure and emergency services.
- **Check State Constraints:** Tennessee state law limits what local governments can do regarding taxes, tobacco, firearms, and public container regulations, making it necessary to understand both levels of law to know if a local regulation is valid.

# DISCUSSION TWO

## WHY DOES THE CITIZEN NEED TO KNOW ECONOMIC STATUS OF ITS COMMUNITY IN RELATION TO COUNTY GOVERNMENT?

Knowing the economic status of a community relative to the county government is essential for citizens to understand tax burdens, the adequacy of public services (schools, roads), and the availability of employment opportunities. This knowledge fosters informed decision-making on local policies and ensures accountability for financial management.

Understanding the economic status of a community in relation to county government is crucial for citizens as it directly impacts their daily lives and future prospects. By being aware of the community's financial health, residents can better grasp the distribution and fairness of tax burdens, which can influence their personal finances.

Additionally, this knowledge helps evaluate the adequacy of public services such as schools, healthcare, and infrastructure like roads, which are vital for quality of life. Employment opportunities are also tied to the economic status, as a thriving economy can attract businesses and create jobs.

Informed citizens are better equipped to participate in local governance, advocating for policies that align with their needs and holding officials accountable for responsible financial management. This transparency and engagement are fundamental to fostering a community that thrives economically and socially.

# DISCUSSION TWO

## WHY DOES THE CITIZEN NEED TO KNOW ECONOMIC STATUS OF ITS COMMUNITY IN RELATION TO COUNTY GOVERNMENT?

### Key Reasons for Understanding Local Economic Status:

- **Policy Influence & Accountability**: Citizens can engage in informed advocacy when they understand whether the municipality is facing fiscal distress or growth.
- **Taxation & Public Services**: It helps residents understand their tax contributions in relation to their ability to pay and the quality of services provided.
- **Economic Development**: Knowing the community's position allows businesses and residents to identify opportunities for growth, investment, and job development.
- **Health & Equity**: Economic factors are crucial determinants of health and well-being, influencing access to education, transportation, and health services within the county.
- **Transparency**: Access to budget data and financial audits allows for the oversight of public funds

# DISCUSSION TWO

WHY DOES THE CITIZEN NEED TO KNOW ECONOMIC STATUS OF ITS COMMUNITY IN RELATION TO COUNTY GOVERNMENT?

**Claiborne County, TN, in 2024 presents an intriguing economic profile marked by steady growth and resilience. With employment rising by 2.05% to accommodate 13.6k people, the county is carving a niche in the manufacturing sector, which remains a significant driver of its economy. Despite a relatively low wealth grade, the county is making strides toward prosperity, as evidenced by a median household income of approximately \$49,379. This figure, while modest, underscores the industrious spirit of the community. Furthermore, the poverty rate, although still notable at 17.4%, is on a downward trend, indicating gradual socio-economic improvement. Alongside manufacturing, the healthcare and education sectors are pivotal, contributing to the county's economic landscape and offering diverse employment opportunities. This combination of industry focus and economic momentum positions Claiborne County as a promising area for future development and investment.**

# DISCUSSION TWO

WHY DOES THE CITIZEN NEED TO KNOW ECONOMIC STATUS OF ITS COMMUNITY IN RELATION TO COUNTY GOVERNMENT?

## Key 2024 Economic Data

- **Employment & Growth:** 13.6k people employed, with a 2.05% job growth rate.
- **Primary Industries:** Manufacturing (2,472 employees), Health Care & Social Assistance (1,896), and Educational Services (1,891).
- **Income Levels:** Median household income is  $\approx$ \$49,379, while the average household income is \$68,389.
- **Poverty Rate:** Approx. 17.4% of residents live below the poverty line, though this represents a 3.4% decrease in that population.
- **Top Paying Industries:** Utilities (\$70,913 avg), Transportation & Warehousing (\$63,659 avg).
- **Age-Based Earnings:** Households with earners 25–44 earn the highest median (\$64,076), while those under 25 earn the least (\$32,321).

## Key Challenges & Trends

- **Cost of Living vs. Income:** Despite moderate living costs, 73% of households in some areas report income under \$50,000.
- **Wealth Grade:** The county is rated a 'D' for overall economic prosperity, lagging behind the state average.
- **Workforce:** Primary occupations are production (1,801) and office/administrative support (1,425).

# DATA 2024 US CENSUS

- **As of July 1, 2024 Claiborne County TN population is 33,070**
  - 52% of citizen population work
  - 20% of citizens are 65 years or older
  - 16% are under 65 and disabled
  - 19% are children under 18
- ***17% of Claiborne County residents live at or below poverty***
  - The CC median income in Claiborne County is \$49,379
  - The CC median income in TN is \$ 87,314
  - 9% of CC household incomes above \$150,000
  - 23% of CC households with income between \$75,000 & \$149,999
  - 68% of CC households have income less than \$74,999

[https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/claibornecountytennessee/PS/T045224#:~:text=Population%2C%20percent%20change%20%2D%20April%201%2C%202020%20\(estimates%20base\)%20to%20July%201%2C%202025&text=Median%20households%20income%20\(in%202024%20dollars\)%2C%202020%2D2024%2C%20\\$49%2C379](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/claibornecountytennessee/PS/T045224#:~:text=Population%2C%20percent%20change%20%2D%20April%201%2C%202020%20(estimates%20base)%20to%20July%201%2C%202025&text=Median%20households%20income%20(in%202024%20dollars)%2C%202020%2D2024%2C%20$49%2C379)

# DISCUSSION THREE

IF THE CITIZEN IS UNAWARE OF COUNTY LEGISLATION AND STAS WHO BENEFITS FROM THE CITIZEN "NOT KNOWING" ?

When citizens remain uninformed about local county legislation, statutes, and ordinances, it can create an environment where certain groups capitalize on this lack of awareness. Incumbent local politicians may benefit as they face less scrutiny and accountability from an uninformed electorate, allowing them to push through agendas that may not align with the broader public interest. Specialized interest groups, like real estate developers, can exploit this gap by influencing policy decisions to favor their objectives, often through lobbying efforts that go unnoticed by the general public. Additionally, bureaucratic structures may thrive in such situations due to reduced oversight, enabling inefficiency and complacency to persist without challenge. Ultimately, this dynamic can lead to decisions that prioritize the interests of a few over the well-being of the community, highlighting the importance of civic engagement and informed citizenship in promoting transparency and accountability in governance.

# DISCUSSION THREE

## PLAIN & SIMPLE

### Key Beneficiaries of Citizen Ignorance

- **Incumbent Politicians and Officials:** A disengaged electorate allows officials to pass regulations, approve projects, or alter budgets with minimal public scrutiny or resistance. This reduces political accountability, allowing politicians to cater to special interests rather than the general public.
- **Special Interest Groups and Developers:** When local land-use laws, zoning regulations, and developmental ordinances are not widely known, "growth machine" coalitions—such as developers, contractors, and local businesses—can influence policies to favor their own interests, such as increasing development density or limiting competition.
- **"The System" and Bureaucracy:** In some cases, complex or hidden regulations allow agencies and departments to operate with greater autonomy. If citizens do not know the rules, they cannot effectively challenge decisions, leading to administrative efficiency for the government but inequity for the public.
- **Privileged Information Holders:** Entities that have the resources to track local legislation—lobbyists, large landholders, and well-connected corporations—gain a competitive advantage, allowing them to capitalize on regulatory changes before the general public is aware of them

# DISCUSSION THREE

## PLAIN & SIMPLE

### Impact of Unawareness

- **"De Facto" Disenfranchisement:** Even if legal rights exist, lack of awareness or confusion about local laws can prevent people from participating in local democracy, such as voting in municipal elections or attending city council meetings.
- **Erosion of Property Values and Local Environment:** Uninformed voters often allow zoning changes that increase housing costs and reduce affordability, or that cause long-term harm to local environmental quality.
- **Increased Vulnerability to Abuses of Power:** When the public does not know their rights or the limitations placed on local authorities, it becomes easier for officials to enforce policies arbitrarily.

**In essence, a lack of awareness regarding local statutes enables a small, informed minority to dominate decision-making, while the majority of citizens live under rules they did not know were being created**



# THANK YOU

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