



March 12, 2025

Inmate Labor for Private Purposes Prohibited-Workhouse

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the CTAS website (ctas.tennessee.edu). This website is maintained 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 CTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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Reference Number: CTAS-1450

No sheriff, jailer or other person responsible for the care and custody of inmates housed in a county workhouse may employ, require or otherwise use any such inmate to perform labor that will or may result directly or indirectly in the sheriff's, jailer's or other person's personal gain, profit or benefit or in gain, profit or benefit to a business partially or wholly owned by the sheriff, jailer or other person. This prohibition applies regardless of whether the inmate is or is not compensated for any such labor. T.C.A. § 41-2-148(a). See *also* Op. Tenn. Atty. Gen. No. 03-075 (June 18, 2003).

No sheriff, jailer or other person responsible for the care and custody of inmates housed in a county workhouse may permit any inmate to perform any labor for the gain, profit or benefit of a private citizen, or for-profit corporation, partnership or other business unless such labor is part of a court-approved work release program or unless the work release program operates under a commission established pursuant to T.C.A. § 41-2-134. T.C.A. § 41-2-148(b)(1). See *also* Op. Tenn. Atty. Gen. No. 03-125 (September 29, 2003).

Penalties

Any sheriff, jailer or other person responsible for the custody of an inmate housed in a local facility who violates the provisions of T.C.A. § 41-2-148, upon the person's first such conviction therefor, commits a misdemeanor and shall be punished by a fine equal to the value of the services received from the inmate or inmates and imprisonment for not less than 30 days nor more than 11 months and 29 days. Upon a second or subsequent conviction for a violation of T.C.A. § 41-2-148, such sheriff, jailer or other person is guilty of a felony and shall be punished by a fine of not less than the value of the services received from the inmate or inmates nor more than \$5,000 and imprisonment for not less than one nor more than five years. If the person violating T.C.A. § 41-2-148 for the second or subsequent time is a public official, in addition to the punishment set out above, such person shall immediately forfeit such person's office and shall be forever barred from holding public office in this state. T.C.A. § 41-2-148(d)(1). See *In re Williams*, 987 S.W.2d 837 (Tenn. 1998).

Any private citizen, corporation, partnership or other business knowingly and willfully using inmate labor in violation of T.C.A. § 41-2-148(b) commits a Class A misdemeanor and, upon conviction, shall be punished by a fine of \$1,000 and by imprisonment for not more than 11 months and 29 days. Each day inmate labor is used in violation of T.C.A. § 41-2-148(b) constitutes a separate offense. T.C.A. § 41-2-148(d)(2).

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