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# Disbursement Warrants

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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.

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Table of Contents

<b>Disbursement Warrants .....</b>	<b>. 3</b>
<b>County Mayor - Disbursement Warrants .....</b>	<b>. 3</b>
<b>Highway Department Disbursement Warrants .....</b>	<b>. 3</b>
<b>Schools Disbursement Warrants .....</b>	<b>. 3</b>
<b>Disbursement Warrants under Fiscal Control Acts of 1957 .....</b>	<b>. 4</b>
<b>Disbursement Warrants under Financial Management System of 1981 .....</b>	<b>. 5</b>
<b>.....</b>	

## Disbursement Warrants

Reference Number: CTAS-1841

The county officers with the power to write warrants vary from county to county according to the applicable laws.

## County Mayor - Disbursement Warrants

Reference Number: CTAS-1846

The county mayor in most counties has the power to issue a warrant on the county general fund, debt service fund and other special funds. T.C.A. § 5-6-108. The county mayor shall be the accounting officer and general agent of the county; and, as such, it shall be the county mayor's duty to-

Draw, without seal, all warrants upon the county treasury; T.C.A. § 5-6-108(5)

Enter in a book, to be known as the warrant book, in the order of issuance, the number, date, amount and name of the drawee of each warrant drawn upon the treasury; T.C.A. § 5-6-108(8).

Pursuant to this statute, the county mayor must track and document all county payments, audit all claims for money against the county, draw all warrants on the county treasury, require county officers to settle their accounts, keep a record of all receipts and disbursements, and report to the county legislative body on the county's financial condition. See Op. Tenn. Atty. Gen. 99-051 (March 4, 1999) (powers and duties of county mayor as county's fiscal agent).

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 5-6-110(1), it is the duty of the county mayor to draw the county mayor's warrant on the county trustee for the payment of any judgment recovered against, or debt due from, the county.

Finally, pursuant to T.C.A. § 5-9-307(a), no money shall be drawn out of the treasury of the county except upon the warrant of the county mayor. The foregoing provisions are general in nature and may be modified or superceded in counties operating under local option general laws, private acts, or charter forms of government. See, e.g., *Shelby County v. Blanton*, 595 S.W.2d 72 (Tenn. App. 1978) (the county mayor and director of finance are the proper persons to sign the warrants of Shelby County).

## Highway Department Disbursement Warrants

Reference Number: CTAS-1849

Under the Tennessee County Uniform Highway Law the chief administrative officer (CAO) has oversight of the county highway department. Pursuant to T.C.A. § 54-7-113, which governs the receipt and disbursement of county highway funds as well as county highway purchases, the funds of the county highway department shall be expended only upon a disbursement warrant drawn on the trustee in accordance with law. See Op. Tenn. Atty. Gen. 01-084 (May 23, 2001) (funds for the county road system must be expended upon the warrant of the county trustee). Note that some private acts provide warrant issuing authority to the CAO of county highway departments.

## Schools Disbursement Warrants

Reference Number: CTAS-1850

*Board of Education.* It is the duty of the local board of education to order warrants drawn on the county trustee. T.C.A. § 49-2-203(a)(4).

*Chair of the Local Board of Education.* It is the duty of the chair of the local board of education to countersign all warrants authorized by the board of education and issued by the director of schools for all expenditures of the school system. T.C.A. § 49-2-205(4). See Op. Tenn. Atty. Gen. 79-180 (April 19, 1979).

*Director of Schools.* It is the duty of the director of schools to issue, within ten days, all warrants authorized by the board for expenditures for public school funds. T.C.A. § 49-2-301(b)(1)(E).

*Mechanical Signing of Warrants.* Pursuant to T.C.A. § 49-2-113, a board of education, with the permission of its chair, is empowered to authorize, with the consent of the commissioner of education and the comptroller, the use of mechanical signing equipment approved by the commissioner and comptroller of

the treasury, to affix the signature of the chair of the board of education and of the director of schools to the original of a public school warrant; provided, that a clear duplicate of the warrant is kept on file in the office of the director of schools, together with the proper supporting papers to justify the issuance of the warrant.

*County Trustee.* It is the duty of the county trustee to require the director of schools to attach a voucher to every school warrant amounting to \$500 or more drawn by the county board of education for any purpose other than the salaries of the supervisors and teachers, showing that the board has complied with the law requiring contracts to be let on competitive bids. Additionally, it is the duty of the county trustee to keep all public school funds separate and apart from all other funds coming into the trustee's hands. T.C.A. § 49-2-103. *See also* T.C.A. § 8-11-104.

*Student Activity Funds.* A school may, if authorized by the board of education, receive funds for student activities and for events held at or in connection with the school. Funds derived from such sources are the property of the school. The board of education must provide reasonable regulations, standards, procedures and an accounting manual covering the various phases of student body activity funds and other internal school funds accounting. T.C.A. § 49-2-110(a). The regulations must include, among other things, procedures for the proper handling of cash receipts, the making of deposits, the management of funds, the expenditures of funds and the accounting for funds. T.C.A. § 49-2-110(a)(2). It is the duty of the principal of each school to institute and follow the regulations, standards, procedures and the accounting manual adopted by the board of education. T.C.A. § 49-2-110(d). Additionally, the State Department of Education has prepared a uniform accounting policy manual for local school systems as required by T.C.A. § 49-2-110(e) which must be followed. *See* Op. Tenn. Atty. Gen. 92-54 (September 24, 1992).

With regard to school support organizations (e.g. booster clubs, parent teacher associations, parent teacher organizations) handling of money *see* T.C.A. § 49-2-110(f) and T.C.A. § 49-2-601 *et seq.* *See also* Op. Tenn. Atty. Gen. 08-174 (November 18, 2008) (School Support Organization Financial Accountability Act).

## Disbursement Warrants under Fiscal Control Acts of 1957

### Reference Number: CTAS-1851

The Fiscal Control Acts of 1957 are divided into three separate acts: budgeting (T.C.A. § 5-12- 101 *et seq.*), accounting (T.C.A. § 5-13-101 *et seq.*), and purchasing (T.C.A. § 5-14-101 *et seq.*).

In those counties operating under the County Fiscal Control Acts of 1957 it is the duty of the director of accounts and budgets to prepare disbursement warrants on all county funds. T.C.A. § 5-13-105(b)(1). It is the duty of the director to sign all county disbursement warrants as evidence of the director's audit and approval of the expenditure. T.C.A. § 5-13-105(b)(2). *See also* T.C.A. § 5-12-110(f)(2). However, no disbursement warrant drawn on the county trustee becomes a county liability payable by the county trustee until the warrant has also been signed by the county mayor, county director of schools, or other official or officials whose signatures are required on such warrants. T.C.A. § 5-13-105(b)(2).

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 5-12-110(f)(1), expenditures from all funds of the county, except school funds, shall be made by disbursement warrants on the county trustee signed by the county mayor and the director of accounts and budgets, and no other official, department, institution or agency of the county may issue negotiable warrants or vouchers for expenditures.

Before any obligation against the county is paid or any disbursement warrant or voucher issued therefor, a detailed invoice or statement approved by the head of the office, department or agency for which the obligation was made must be filed with the director of accounts and budgets. The director must make a careful pre-audit of such invoice or statement, including a comparison with any encumbrance document previously posted or filed authorizing such obligation, and must approve for payment only such items as appear to be correct, properly authorized, and not exceeding the otherwise unencumbered balance of the allotments or appropriations against which they are chargeable. T.C.A. § 5-13-107(a) and (b). *See also* T.C.A. § 5-12-110(f)(2).

Disbursement warrants must be promptly prepared for all such approved items by the director and mailed or delivered to the payees thereof. A duplicate copy of all disbursement warrants, with all original invoices or other supporting documents, or both, attached to the duplicate copies, must be kept on file in the office of the director. T.C.A. § 5-13-107(c) and (d).

*Payroll Account.* The director and the county mayor are authorized to maintain a special county payroll account at a local bank at the county seat in which disbursement warrants for the total of each payroll may be deposited and against which individual net earning checks may be issued to each county

employee. The county mayor may authorize the issuance of payroll checks on the signature of the director, and in such event the depository bank shall be so instructed. T.C.A. § 5-13-105(g)(2) and (3).

*Application to Schools.* The provisions of the 1957 laws do not apply to county school funds for any purpose, the county board of education, and the county director of schools unless approved by the commissioner of education. T.C.A. §§ 5-12-113; 5-13-110; 5-14-115. See Op. Tenn. Atty. Gen. 88-25 (February 2, 1988).

In counties where the 1957 laws have been approved for schools, the accounts and other obligations of the county department of education, other than payrolls, are paid by disbursement warrants drawn on the county trustee by the county board of education. Copies of all disbursement warrants issued by the board of education, showing the accounting classification chargeable, shall be furnished by the board of education to the director of accounts and budgets daily as issued. As an alternative, disbursement warrants may be prepared in the office of the director of accounts and budgets for the county board of education. T.C.A. § 5-12-110(e).

## Disbursement Warrants under Financial Management System of 1981

Reference Number: CTAS-1852

In those counties operating under the County Financial Management System of 1981, the director of the finance department cosigns all disbursement warrants for all funds that are handled by the county trustee. Disbursement warrants are prepared by the director of finance and signed in accordance with T.C.A. § 5-21-116. T.C.A. § 5-21-115(b)(3). See Op. Tenn. Atty. Gen. 99-032 (February 18, 1999) (authority to sign disbursement warrants).

Pursuant to T.C.A. § 5-21-116(a), all disbursement warrants drawn on the county trustee for the obligations of all county departments, agencies, and officials, including the county mayor, the county highway department, and the county department of education, are signed as follows:

- (1) The disbursement warrants are prepared in the finance department, and provided to each department for signing.
- (2) Upon preparation of the warrant by the finance department, the department head signing the disbursement warrant keeps one copy for filing in the department.
- (3) The original and all other copies of the warrant are returned to the director for the director's signature as a cosigner and for filing and mailing from the finance department.
- (4) A duplicate copy of all disbursement warrants, with all original invoices and other supporting documents attached thereto, are kept on file in the office of the director.

T.C.A. § 5-21-116(b).

In lieu of each department agency or official signing disbursement warrants, the departments may authorize the director to use a signature plate in accordance with the general law and approval by the comptroller of the treasury. If a signature plate is used, it must be secured in a safe place when not in use and supervised by the person responsible for its safekeeping when in use. A record must be maintained indicating when the signature plate is used, numbers of the warrants signed, and the person using such plate. T.C.A. § 5-21-116(c).

*Payroll Account.* The financial management committee shall maintain a special county payroll account at a bank, in which disbursement warrants for the total of each payroll shall be deposited and against which individual net earning checks may be issued to each of the county employees. The committee may authorize the issuance of payroll checks on the signature of the director of finance and, in such event, the depository bank shall be so instructed. T.C.A. § 5-21-117.

*Application to Schools.* The provisions of the 1981 Act apply to county school funds if the Act has been adopted by the county. See Op. Tenn. Atty. Gen. 88-202 (December 2, 1988).

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