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Optional Checking System

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,

The University of Tennessee
County Technical Assistance Service
226 Anne Dallas Dudley Boulevard, Suite 400
Nashville, Tennessee 37219
615.532.3555 phone
615.532.3699 fax
www.ctas.tennessee.edu

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The county trustee may adopt a checking system for the disbursing of county funds by the county trustee as prescribed by T.C.A. § 5-8-210 by giving at least thirty days notice to each official authorized to sign checks. Once adopted, the trustee may, with the approval of the county finance committee created pursuant to T.C.A. § 5-8-201, or with the approval of the county legislative body, discontinue the practice. T.C.A. § 5-8-210(a).

County Master Account. The "county master account" means all accounts maintained by the county trustee for the purpose of handling banking transactions of the various county funds required by law to be managed by the county trustee, except for any check clearing account as defined in T.C.A. § 5-8-210(c). It is the duty of the county trustee to reconcile all county master accounts and maintain all records as required by law relating to such accounts, including maintaining paid checks. T.C.A. § 5-8-210(b).

Check Clearing Account. A "check clearing account" includes any account created for combined offices and departments or created for separate offices or departments, or both, that the county trustee establishes as a separate checking account for county payrolls or as a method of certifying checks. If any check clearing account is established, the account must be reconciled by the county trustee, except that a separate clearing account established for a single office or department shall be reconciled by that office or department; provided, that if the county trustee deems it necessary or advisable, the county trustee may reconcile any check clearing account established for a single office or department, which shall include maintaining the paid checks. T.C.A. § 5-8-210(c).

Bank Accounts. In any county coming under T.C.A. § 5-8-210, a county master account and a check clearing account are established by the county trustee at a financial institution selected by the county finance committee created pursuant to T.C.A. § 5-8-201 or, if the county legislative body has not created a county finance committee or the county finance committee fails to specify one or more financial institutions, then the county trustee may select a financial institution authorized to handle the account. The financial institution shall be selected based on the institution offering the highest and best bid or bids to pay interest on daily balances of the county's funds, considering the lowest service charges, and considering other factors affecting safety and liquidity of county moneys. T.C.A. § 5-8-210(e).

Once a financial institution has been selected, the county trustee is required to establish one or more county master bank accounts or one or more check clearing accounts, or both, and have each official authorized by law to sign checks drawn on each account to complete forms as required by the financial institution. The forms must be completed and returned to the financial institution prior to any checks being issued on the account. Persons who have the authority to sign checks drawn on the account must promptly complete these forms and return them to the county trustee. The county trustee is required to maintain a copy of these forms and to provide a copy of each completed form to the county mayor and to each person who is authorized to sign checks drawn on the account. T.C.A. § 5-8-210(f).

The county trustee, in conjunction with the financial institution, may designate specifications for checks used to make withdrawals on any account established pursuant to T.C.A. § 5-8-210. In the event of a written objection to the specifications by the county mayor, a department head, the director of accounts and budgets, or the director of finance is filed with the trustee, the county trustee's specifications for checks shall be approved by the finance committee created pursuant to T.C.A. § 5-8-201, or by the county legislative body. T.C.A. § 5-8-210(g).

Financial institution charges incurred by a county for a county master account or for a check clearing account are an allowable office expense for the county trustee. Financial institution charges incurred for a check clearing account established for a single office or department are a charge against the funds of that office or department. T.C.A. § 5-8-210(d).

Certification of Checks. In any county that adopts the provisions of T.C.A. § 5-8-210, the issuance of checks shall be certified by one of the following methods adopted by the county trustee:

- (1) List Certification Method. This method requires each department, including the county mayor, a department head, director of accounts and budgets, and a director of finance, to submit a list by fund to the county trustee of the checks being issued showing the date of the check, check number, payee and amount. The county trustee verifies the department's fund balance and certifies that funds are available or will be available in the "check clearing account" for payment of those checks. The county trustee then transfers funds from the "county master account" to the "check clearing account." The county trustee may develop a procedure for emergency certification by the county trustee in circumstances where such would be reasonable, in which event the county trustee must be provided with a written document for certification by the end of the next business day;

(2) Check Signing/Validation Method. This method requires each department, including the county mayor, department heads, director of accounts and budgets, and directors of finance, to submit a list to the county trustee of checks being issued showing the date of the check, check number, payee and amount. The county trustee verifies the department's fund balance. The county trustee signs or validates each check if sufficient funds are or will be available and makes any necessary transfer of funds from the master account to the check clearing account;

(3) Combination Method. The method outlined in (1) may be followed for some offices and departments, and the method outlined in (2) followed for other offices and departments in the discretion of the county trustee; or

(4) Any other certification method requested by the county trustee and approved by the comptroller of the treasury. T.C.A. § 5-8-210(h).

When the county trustee has certified that funds are available, the total amount certified shall be charged to the fund on which the check or checks are drawn on at least a daily basis so that a current balance is maintained. T.C.A. § 5-8-210(I).

Any reference in the *Tennessee Code Annotated* or regulations issued pursuant to the code that require or authorize the issuance or acceptance of a county warrant shall also authorize the issuance or acceptance of a check drawn pursuant to T.C.A. § 5-8-210 and, to the extent that the provisions of T.C.A. § 5-8-210 conflict with other laws or regulations, the provisions of T.C.A. § 5-8-210 shall apply in any county in which this section has been adopted by the county trustee as provided in T.C.A. § 5-8-210(a). T.C.A. § 5-8-210(j).

Any person who signs or issues any check required to be certified by the county trustee, that has not been certified by the county trustee in accordance with T.C.A. § 5-8-210, is in violation of the law and is subject to removal from position or office, and is subject to personal liability for any improperly disbursed funds. T.C.A. § 5-8-210(k).

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