



# County Technical Assistance Service

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## Campaign Contribution Limits

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Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the CTAS electronic library known as e-Li. This online library is maintained daily 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 e-Li material.

Sincerely,

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## Table of Contents

Campaign Contribution Limits.....	3
-----------------------------------	---

## Campaign Contribution Limits

**Reference Number:** CTAS-879

In 1995 the General Assembly passed the Campaign Contribution Limits Act, codified in T.C.A. Title 2, Chapter 10, Part 3. As with most other areas of campaign finance, the Registry of Election Finance has administrative and enforcement powers over this act.

The act prohibits contributions by a person to any candidate that, in the aggregate, exceed \$2,500 in a statewide election or \$1,000 in other state or local elections. Multicandidate political campaign committees are limited to contributions of \$7,500 in statewide elections and \$5,000 in other state and local elections.

Candidates running in statewide elections are prohibited from accepting more than 50 percent of their total contributions from multicandidate political campaign committees. For any other office there is a simple \$75,000 limit on the total contributions from multicandidate committees. These calculations do not include contributions made to the candidate by a political party.

Some contributions may be indirectly attributed to the candidate. Anyone involved in campaign or fundraising activities should examine the rules regarding these contributions. T.C.A. § 2-10-303.

The limitations of this statute do not apply to loans of money by a financial institution as defined in T.C.A. § 45-10-102(3) if they meet certain qualifications. There are also limits on the aggregate contributions allowed by political parties. They are: \$250,000 in statewide elections, \$40,000 for candidates for the Senate, and \$20,000 for elections to other state or local public office. T.C.A. § 2-10-306.

Contribution limits are adjusted to reflect the percentage of change in the average consumer price index (all items-city average), as published by the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, for the period of January 1, 1996, through December 31, 2010. The Registry of Election Finance publishes each such adjusted amount on its Web site. T.C.A. § 2-10-302.

The term "contributions" as used in these statutes is defined very broadly. T.C.A. § 2-10-306. Once again, anyone involved in fundraising or campaign activities should take a close look at these statutes or contact the Registry of Election Finance for advice. Contributions that exceed the limit will not be considered a violation of these laws if the candidate or political campaign committee returns the contribution to the person who made the contribution within 60 days of the receipt of the contribution. T.C.A. § 2-10-307.

The registry may impose a penalty up to \$10,000 or 115 percent of the contributions that exceed the limits. If the penalty is not paid for 30 days, the candidate becomes ineligible to qualify for election until the penalty is paid.

Each candidate for local public office or political campaign committee for a local election shall file with each county election commission of the county where the election is held a statement of all contributions received and all expenditures made by or on behalf of such candidate or such committee. T.C.A. § 2-10-105(b). Penalties for failure to timely file the statement of contributions and expenditures are found in T.C.A. § 2-10-110.

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