



# Blount County Budget Committee Memo

TO: Blount County Commissioners

FROM: Judge Kenlyn Foster

RE: Safe Baby Court – Blount County Expansion Site

DATE: December 20, 2024

## 1. Background. Blount County Juvenile Court has been selected as a Safe Baby Court.

Tennessee's Safe Baby Court (SBC) program began in 2017 pursuant to legislation passed by the Tennessee General Assembly in 2016. See Tenn. Code Ann. § 37-1-901 et seq. The legislation's intent was to address critical needs for Tennessee's youngest and most vulnerable children and their families. Tennessee SBCs use a collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach to dependency and neglect cases with the needs of the youngest children (ages zero through three and their siblings) as the touchstone for decisions in the case. Anchored by the juvenile court judge or magistrate, each jurisdiction has a coordinator whose responsibility is to integrate and coordinate system responses to each participating family. The team addresses barriers to permanency, along with any other needs a child and a caregiver might have. Special focus is placed on the mental health of a child who has either been placed in DCS custody or is at risk of being placed into DCS custody.

(Tenn. Safe Baby Court Ann. Rpt. 2023).

The Administrative Office of the Courts, in consultation with the Department of Children's Services and the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, is responsible for determining the location of each Safe Baby Court location. **There is no grant application process. This is a statutorily created specialty court.** Sites are selected, notified, and asked to become Safe Baby Courts. It is an honor for Blount County to be selected for this important initiative to benefit our most vulnerable citizens.

## 2. History (tell if the item has been brought to the budget committee previously) This is

the first application.

3. Current Operations (how are operations without the requested item/service) N/A.
4. Proposal (what is the new item/service being requested) Approval of the \$100,000 per year grant to create and fund the SBC Coordinator position and to provide an additional salary supplement to the Juvenile Court Services Director for oversight, supervision, and other designated tasks.
5. Impact if not funded (provide a summary on impact to the mission if the item/service is not approved) First, we would miss a wonderful opportunity to further protect vulnerable infants and children. Second, Blount County would be rejecting a highly regarded and sought after initiative that is statistically proven to improve outcomes for children and families and is highly regarded and very successful in other counties across the state. Third, it is important that this grant be accepted this fiscal year as we will receive the entirety of the grant award. We are permitted to use the surplus funds to purchase office equipment and start up materials.

Budget Impact	
Original Budget	
Amendment Impact	
Proposed Revised Budget	



Signature from Department Head/Elected (or designee)