

# Blount County Government Employee Handbook



Blount County Government  
Maryville, TN

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# Introduction

We are pleased to introduce the revised Blount County employee handbook. This handbook has been designed to outline and summarize basic personnel policies, employee benefits, employee responsibilities, and employee rights. This handbook is intended to be useful for all Blount County employees.

Blount County is committed to providing a quality workplace for employees. It is our goal to:

- Provide management that is skilled, fair, and concerned about the welfare of our employees.
- Equitably compensate each employee in accordance with our classification and compensation plan.
- Fill vacancies or new positions, where appropriate, by transfer or promotion from within the County.
- Discuss willingly and frankly any problems, complaints, or questions regarding County personnel policies.
- Keep employees informed of any changes that may affect them or their families.

This handbook revokes and supersedes all prior handbooks, amendments, and any policy or communication related to the employee handbook.

This handbook was developed to provide general guidelines about Blount County Government's policies and procedures for employees; however, it does not contain promises to any employee about how any particular situation will be handled. It is a guide to assist employees in becoming familiar with some of the benefits and obligations of employment, including our policy of at-will employment. None of the guidelines in this handbook are intended to give rise to contractual rights or obligations, or to be construed as a guarantee of employment for any specific period of time or any specific type of work. These guidelines are subject to modification, amendment, or revocation by Blount County Government at any time, without advance notice.

It is the intention of Blount County Government to adhere to all State and Federal laws. Any personnel policy found to be in conflict with a State or Federal law will be changed to ensure compliance with the law.

Amendments to the handbook may be made periodically and communicated to all Blount County employees.

All questions pertaining to information found in this handbook should be referred to the Human Resources Department.

**A complete procedures manual corresponding to the following policies may be accessed at [www.blounttn.org/hr](http://www.blounttn.org/hr).**

## ***Policies for Employees of Elected Officials***

Elected Officials have the jurisdiction to create, maintain, and administer additional personnel

policies and procedures. In these cases, the Elected Officials will provide the additional policies for their employees as required by T.C.A 5-23-103.

## State and Federal Policies

### ***Equal Employment Opportunity Policy***

Blount County maintains an equal employment opportunity policy and does not discriminate in hiring practices or terms and conditions of employment. All applicants and employees receive equal employment opportunities and all personnel decisions, actions, and conditions affecting employees, including, but not limited to hiring, assignment, transfer, promotion, and compensation, will be governed by the principles of equal opportunity.

Discrimination against any person in recruitment, examination, appointment, training, promotion, retention, or discipline because of political or religious opinions or affiliations or because of race, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, veteran status, or any other category protected by law, shall be prohibited. The Human Resources Director has been designated as the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Officer for Blount County. The EEO Officer has overall responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of the County's Equal Employment Policy.

### ***No Harassment***

The County does not tolerate the harassment of applicants, employees, customers, or vendors. Any form of harassment relating to an individual's race, color, sex (including same sex, sexual identity, or orientation), religion, age, national origin, handicap or disability, citizenship status, veteran status, political affiliation, retaliation for protected activity, or any other protected activity or category is a violation of this policy and will be treated as a disciplinary matter.

**Violation of this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including immediate termination.**

Employees with questions regarding what constitutes harassing behavior or what conduct is prohibited by this policy may discuss the questions with immediate supervisors. At a minimum, the term "harassment" as used in this policy includes:

- Offensive remarks, comments, jokes, slurs, or verbal conduct pertaining to an individual's race, color, sex, religion, age, national origin, handicap or disability, citizenship status, or any other protected category
- Offensive pictures, drawings, photographs, or other graphic conduct or communications, including e-mail, faxes, and copies pertaining to an individual's race, color, sex, religion, age, national origin, handicap or disability, citizenship status, or any other protected category
- Offensive sexual remarks, sexual advances, or requests for sexual favors regardless of the gender of the individuals involved
- Offensive physical conduct, including touching, regardless of the gender of the

individuals involved

- Threatening an employee for refusing to respond to requests for sexual favors, for reporting a violation of this policy, or for participating in an investigation conducted under this policy.

Supervisors and managers are subject to this policy and are prohibited from engaging in any form of harassing conduct. No supervisor or other member of management has the authority to suggest to any applicant or employee that employment or advancement will be affected by the individual entering (or refusing to enter) a personal relationship with the supervisor or manager. Such conduct is a direct violation of this policy.

Harassment of our employees in connection with their work by non-employees also may be a violation of this policy. Any employee who experiences or observes any harassment of an employee by a non-employee should report such harassment to a member of management or the Human Resources Department.

Employees who believe that the No Harassment policy has been violated should promptly report the matter to their immediate supervisor, Department Head, or the Human Resources Department. Any actions believed to violate the No Harassment policy, no matter how slight the action may seem, should be reported.

Reported incidents will be investigated. Where appropriate, prompt disciplinary action, up to and including immediate termination, will be taken. The County will protect the confidentiality of employees making complaints about suspected violations of this or any other County policy, to the extent possible consistent with our investigation and applicable law.

**Employees will not be penalized or retaliated against for reporting improper conduct, harassment, or other actions that are believed to violate this policy.**

Blount County Government is serious about enforcing the No Harassment policy. Potential policy violations cannot be resolved unless reported. Employees are responsible for bringing concerns regarding possible policy violations to the attention of supervisors, managers, Department Heads, or the Human Resources Department so that appropriate action may be taken to address the concern.

#### ***Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990***

It is the policy of Blount County Government that qualified individuals with disabilities will not be excluded from participation in or benefit from services, programs, or activities of the County. Blount County Government will not discriminate against a qualified individual with a disability in: job application processes; the hiring, advancement, or termination of employment; employee compensation; job training; and other terms, conditions and privileges of employment. It is the intent of Blount County Government to comply with all applicable requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

#### ***Reasonable Accommodations/Modified Job Duties***

Blount County Government will reasonably accommodate persons with a disability. Such

reasonable accommodations may include making facilities readily accessible to individuals with a disability, restructuring jobs, modifying work schedules, modifying equipment, or other similar accommodations. To assist employees who are or become disabled and those employees who suffer on-the-job injuries, Blount County Government will make reasonable accommodations to enable such employees to continue performing the essential functions of their jobs. Consistent with this policy, Blount County Government may modify job duties to comply with medical requirements or restrictions. Other accommodations, such as a transfer to a vacant position for which the employee is qualified, may be appropriate, depending upon specific facts and circumstances of individual situations.

Obviously, there are limits to the accommodations which Blount County Government can reasonably make. When an accommodation would cause an “undue hardship” to the County or its employees, or that may threaten the safety of the requestor or others, the County would be unable to make that particular accommodation. Similarly, where placing an individual in a position, with or without accommodation, would create a direct threat to the employee or others, the County may be unable to place the employee in that particular position.

The Human Resources Department will engage in an interactive process with the supervisor and the requestor to determine if the workplace modification/accommodation will be granted or if an alternative modification/accommodation is appropriate.

#### ***Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964***

Blount County Government ensures compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; 49 CFR, part 21; related statutes and regulations to the end that no person shall be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance on the grounds of race, color, sex, or national origin.

To report any complaints or to receive additional information about Title VI, contact the Title VI Coordinator at 865-273-5780.

#### ***HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act)***

Blount County Government complies with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) and follows guidelines involving the protected health information of employees and dependents.

## **Code of Ethics**

#### ***Ethical Conduct***

It is the policy of Blount County Government to uphold, promote, and demand the highest standards of ethics from all employees and officials, whether elected or appointed. Accordingly, all County employees should maintain the utmost standards of personal integrity, truthfulness, honesty, and fairness in carrying out their public duties; avoid any improprieties in their roles as public servants; and never use their County position or powers for improper personal gain.

Employees are required to maintain the highest ethical standards in the conduct of duties. This



also applies to non-work situations when you identify yourself as a County employee (i.e., wearing a County identification badge, distributing a County business card, wearing a County uniform, driving a County vehicle, etc.). To fulfill this requirement, the following will apply:

- Personal characteristics such as honesty, courtesy, dependability, and use of sound judgment are required for all employees in all classes of work in County government.
- There shall be no activity which conflicts with the interest of your official duties.
- You cannot use your position with the County for private interest.
- You must comply with the County's Code of Ethics Policy.

***Any employee with knowledge of, or having witness to, any unethical behavior occurring within Blount County Government or any of its departments should report the behavior(s). Employees may report violations of the Ethical Conduct policy to the Human Resources Department without fear of retaliation.***

#### ***Conflict of Interest***

Employment with Blount County Government is a public trust. Employees must not have any financial interest in, or receive any financial benefit from, any acquisition or expenditure related to County activities that interferes or conflicts with the full discharge of duties. If the circumstances cause a reasonable person to believe that a conflict of interest exists, a conflict-of-interest form must be filed with the County Clerk's Office, as instructed by the County's Code of Ethics Policy.

#### ***Political Activity***

Employees may join or affiliate with civic organizations of a partisan or a political nature and may attend political meetings. Employees may advocate and support the principles or policies of civic or political organizations in accordance with the Constitution and laws of the State of Tennessee and in accordance with the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America.

Employees MAY NOT:

1. Engage in any political activity while on duty.
2. Use official authority or influence for the purpose of interfering with or affecting the result of an election or a nomination for office.
3. Be required as a duty of employment or as a condition of employment, promotion, or tenure of office to contribute funds for political or partisan purposes.
4. Coerce or compel contributions for political or partisan purposes from another employee of the County.
5. Use any supplies or equipment of the County for political or partisan purposes.

### **Secondary Employment**

Employees shall not engage in any outside employment which adversely affects work performance or creates a conflict of interest. If an employee is engaged in other employment, the employee must notify the supervisor in writing stating the name of the secondary employer, the nature of work or business, specific duties, and hours worked per week. Supervisors will send a copy of these statements to the Human Resources Department for placement in personnel files. If the supervisor believes there may be a potential incompatibility between the outside employment and County employment for any reason, the supervisor will submit appropriate recommendations to the Human Resources Director. The final decision will be made jointly by the Human Resources Director and the Department Head/Elected Official. At all times, employees will give first priority to the fulfillment of the requirements of the Blount County position. County work schedules will not be adjusted to accommodate non-County work schedules.

### **Nepotism**

Members of an employee's immediate family will be considered for employment on the basis of their qualifications. Immediate family may not be hired, however, if employment would:

- 1) Create a relationship whereby one immediate family member is within the chain of command of another,
- 2) Have the potential for creating an adverse impact on work performance; or
- 3) Create either an actual conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest.

This policy must also be considered when assigning, transferring, or promoting an employee. For this policy, immediate family includes spouse, parent, child, step-child, sibling, in-law, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, grandparent, grandchild, and members of households.

Employees who become immediate family members may continue employment if it does not involve any of the above. If one of the conditions outlined should occur, attempts will be made to find a suitable position within the County to which one of the employees will transfer. If employees become immediate family members, Blount County Government will make reasonable efforts to assign job duties to minimize problems of supervision, safety, security, or morale. If accommodations of this nature are not feasible, the employees will be permitted to determine which of them will resign. If the employees cannot decide, the County will decide in its sole discretion who will remain employed, if either.

This policy does not apply to "immediate family" who already are employed by Blount County as of the effective date of this policy; this waiver, however, may not be used as a basis for further exceptions after the effective date of this policy.

*Policy effective date 12/2006*

### **County Equipment**

County equipment, materials, vehicles, and/or other resources assigned to employees shall be used with care and economy and shall be used only for County purposes. Waste or misuse of County resources may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

## **County Vehicle Use Policy**

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that County owned vehicles are operated in a safe manner and for their intended purposes only.

The term 'vehicle' shall apply to all passenger cars, light duty trucks, heavy duty trucks, emergency vehicles, construction equipment, or any other motorized/non-motorized rolling stock used by various County employees in the course of their duties.

### **General Use**

1. Only authorized County employees shall operate County owned vehicles.  
***Supervisors/Department Heads/Elected Officials must notify Human Resources and/or Payroll when a vehicle is issued to an employee for personal use (including commuting to and from work). Use of the vehicle is considered taxable income and must be reported.***
2. Employees operating County owned vehicles must abide by all applicable motor vehicle laws.
3. Transporting non-County personnel in a County owned vehicle is prohibited except as follows:
  - a. When required for legitimate County business.
  - b. As provided in the personal use section of this policy.
  - c. As part of a departmental ride-a-long program authorized by the Department Head or Elected Official.
  - d. In cases of extreme emergency where the employee has a reasonable belief that the life, safety, health, or physical welfare of a citizen would be immediately threatened.
4. Employees driving County vehicles as a part of the job duties are required to maintain a valid Tennessee driver license with proper endorsements for the position.
5. Employees who are authorized to drive County owned vehicles must report any motor vehicle violations that result in a citation to their supervisor as soon as possible. This includes violations that occur in their own vehicle and not on County time.
6. No employee shall carry any concealed weapon in a County vehicle at any time unless:
  - a. They have been authorized to do so by the County Sheriff, or
  - b. They have been authorized to do so by the County Mayor, or their department's Elected Official or Department Head.
7. No employees shall carry alcoholic beverages, contraband, or other illegal substances in County owned vehicles. (Does not apply to law enforcement units conducting undercover operations or transporting evidence.)

### **Personal Use**

Personal use of County owned vehicles is prohibited except for the following:

1. Personnel whose duties primarily involve operation of County owned vehicles at locations which make it inconvenient or inefficient to access their personal vehicles, may use their assigned County owned vehicles for routine personal activities such as traveling to lunch, or other infrequent or incidental short term stops so long as this privilege does not significantly interfere with their assigned duties or otherwise become abused.
2. In cases where there is no convenient means of transportation available, employees assigned take home vehicles may request permission from the County mayor, Department Head or Elected Official to transport members of their household to and from school, work, and other necessary destinations so long as it does not significantly impact the employee's duties, cost of operating the vehicle or significantly increase the County's exposure to liability.
3. Employees who have been granted permission to use a County owned vehicle for out-of-town travel for County business, may allow members of their household to accompany them as passengers if they have properly obtained permission from their Department Head or Elected Official.
4. Tobacco use in County owned vehicles is prohibited.
5. Personal use (including commuting to and from work) of County owned vehicles is considered taxable income and must be reported.

***Blount County Government reserves the right to monitor the usage of County-owned vehicles, with or without the knowledge or consent of the employee to whom the vehicle is assigned.***

### **Accident Reporting**

County employees who are operating a County owned vehicle and are involved in an accident must do the following:

1. Ensure their personal safety and those involved in the accident to their best ability.
2. Notify the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction in the location of the accident.
3. Notify supervisor(s) of the accident as soon as reasonably possible.

### ***Gifts and Contributions***

Employees may not solicit or accept, either directly or indirectly, for yourself or for any member of your household, any gift, gratuity, service, favor, entertainment, lodging, transportation, loan, loan guarantee, or anything above a nominal monetary value from any person who:

- has, or is seeking to obtain, contractual or other business or financial relations with the department or agency of Blount County by which you are employed
- conducts operations or activities that are regulated by the department of Blount County which you are employed
- has an interest that may be substantially affected by the performance or non-performance

of your official duties

## Classification and Compensation

### ***Introductory Period***

All newly hired and rehired employees will be considered on “introductory” status for the first six (6) months of employment. At the end of the regular introductory period, the Department Head can elect to remove the introductory status or extend the introductory period. During the introductory period, the full-time employee will accrue sick days at the stated rate but will not be eligible for annual leave until successfully completing six (6) months of consecutive employment. Successful completion of an introductory period does not alter the employee’s at-will status.

### ***Employment Terms***

- **“Full-Time Regular Employee”** is defined as an employee who works at least thirty (30) hours per week on a regular and continuous basis throughout the calendar year. The single word “employee” will be used to designate a full-time or regular employee on leave policies.
- **“Part-Time Regular Employee”** is defined as an employee who works twenty-nine (29) or fewer hours per week on a regular and continuous basis throughout the calendar year.
- **“Temporary Employee”** is defined as an employee who is engaged to work either full-time or part-time with the understanding that their employment will terminate upon the completion of a specific assignment. These employees may be “exempt” or “non-exempt” as defined below.
- **“Exempt Employee”** is defined as an employee who is not required to be paid overtime, or receive comp time in accordance with federal wage and hour laws, for hours worked over forty (40) in a workweek. Executive employees, professional employees, and certain employees in administrative positions are typically exempt. However, classification of a position as exempt is made on the basis of comparing actual job duties with criteria established by the Department of Labor.
- **“Non-exempt Employee”** is defined as an employee who is required to be paid overtime or receive comp time at time and one-half of their regular rate of pay, in accordance with federal wage and hour laws, for hours worked over forty (40) in a workweek.

### ***Employment at-Will***

Blount County Government is an at-will employer and as such there is no specific length or guarantee of continued employment. The employee or the County may terminate employment at-will, without cause or prior notice, at any time. None of the County's policies may be construed as creating a contract of employment or any other legal obligation, express or implied, and any policy may be amended, revised, supplemented, rescinded or otherwise altered, in whole or in part, at any time, at the sole and absolute discretion of Blount County.

### ***E-Verify***

Blount County Government participates in E-Verify and will provide the federal government with Form I-9 information to confirm that employees are authorized to work in the U.S. If E-Verify cannot confirm that employees are authorized to work, Blount County Government will provide

written instructions and an opportunity to contact Department of Homeland Security (DHS) or Social Security Administration (SSA) to resolve the issue before any action is taken, up to and including terminating employment. Blount County Government will only use E-Verify once a job offer is accepted and Form I-9 completed.

### ***Minimum Age***

To be eligible for employment with Blount County Government, potential employees must be at least 18 years of age. Some departments within Blount County Government may have a different minimum age requirement. Potential employees should check the job posting for age requirements.

### ***Rehired Employees***

Employees returning to work with Blount County Government, regardless of the length of separation, are subject to the same introductory status for the first six (6) months of employment as newly hired employees. At the end of the regular introductory period, the Department Head can elect to remove the introductory status or extend the introductory period. During the introductory period, the full-time employee will accrue sick days at the stated rate but will not be eligible for annual leave until successfully completing six (6) months of consecutive employment. Benefits for the rehired employee are effective the first of the month following thirty (30) days of employment beginning with the date rehired. If the rehired employee has completed a six (6) month probationary during the previous employment period, the TCRS deduction will begin immediately.

### ***Pay Periods***

All General County employees are paid biweekly on every other Monday. Some pay dates may occur earlier due to holidays. In this instance, payroll checks will be issued the Friday before the holiday. All employees are paid in arrears, one week after the end of the pay period.

### ***Job Titles and Pay Structure***

The County has a classification system in place for defining jobs, their titles and pay structure. This system is maintained by the Human Resources Department. For more information regarding the system, job titles, or pay grades please contact the Human Resources Department at 865-273-5780.

### ***Overtime Compensation/Compensatory Time***

No overtime or compensatory time will be earned until the employee has worked on the job over 40 hours during the workweek.

- A. Overtime/Compensatory Time: All eligible employees may be paid overtime or given compensatory time for all work performed over 40 hours during the workweek.
- B. Overtime Rate: Hourly rate employees who work overtime will receive overtime pay at a rate of time and one-half their regular hourly pay. Salaried employees who are eligible will receive overtime pay at a rate of time and one-half their equivalent hourly rate (the salaried employee's equivalent hourly rate is calculated by dividing his/her annual salary by 52 weeks and dividing that number by the number of hours in a normal workweek.) The overtime rates for both hourly and salaried employees apply only to those hours worked over 40 during a week. For salaried employees, no additional compensation will be paid for hours worked under 40. For

hourly rate employees, the overtime rate will apply only to hours worked over 40 and the regular rate will apply to hours worked up to 40 hours.

- C. **Selection of Compensatory Time:** Employees who are required to work more than 40 hours per week may request to receive compensatory time off in lieu of overtime. Such requests must be submitted in writing to supervisors. Such compensatory time shall be earned at a rate of one and one-half hours for each hour of employment worked over 40 hours per week. In the event of termination of employment, all earned and unused compensatory time will be paid. An employee cannot accrue more than 240 hours of compensatory time. Any employee who has accumulated 240 hours of compensatory time shall be paid for any additional overtime that is worked. An employee who has accrued compensatory time upon termination of employment will be paid the greater of the average regular rate the employee received during the last three years, or the final regular rate of pay received by the employee. The use of compensatory time is subject to approval by the Elected Official/Department Head. Requests to use compensatory time will generally be approved provided the use of the compensatory time does not unduly disrupt the operations of the department.

### ***Working during Lunch Periods***

Lunch period is time set aside for eating. The time is not considered part of the basic workday and no pay is earned during this period. Employees must clock out for the lunch period in UKG Ready. Employees must do no work during the lunch period.

A workday may not be shortened by "working through" or reducing the lunch period on a voluntary basis. Eliminating or reducing your lunch period requires prior approval from your immediate supervisor. Such approvals must be limited and will typically be for one day due to unusual or special circumstances. Working through the lunch period is not to be used as an on-going solution for scheduling issues.

### ***Working Before/After Regular Hours***

Employees may not voluntarily begin work early, work after hours, or extend the workday for the purpose of accumulating compensatory time. Prior approval from immediate supervisors is required for any adjustment to the work schedule. For most employees, the workweek is 37.5 hours totaling 75 hours per pay period. ANY flextime must be addressed during the SAME PAY PERIOD. For example: An employee works 35 hours in week one of the pay period creating a 2.5-hour deficit for the pay period. The employee may work 40 hours within the next week to cover the deficit, or use annual leave, sick or compensatory hours to total 75 hours for the pay period.

## **General Personnel Policies**

### ***Attendance***

All employees of Blount County Government are committed to providing the highest level of government services and functions to better serve the community. To accomplish this, prompt and regular attendance is required.

It is required to speak directly to the supervisor if an illness or injury that would prevent an employee from reporting to work at the scheduled time occurs. If the supervisor is unavailable,

employees are required to speak directly to the next-level manager or director, or to the person designated by the supervisor. Text messages are not considered an appropriate means of notification of an absence and will not be accepted as such.

All employees are expected to be in the workplace at the scheduled time the shift begins. Employees will work in accordance with their scheduled start and ending time and must not work alternate times without supervisor's authorization.

Failure to provide notification of an absence may result in removal from the payroll as having resigned without notice. Employees who resign under such circumstances may be deemed ineligible for rehire.

### ***Work Hours and Time Records***

The normal workweek consists of 37.5 hours or 40 hours depending on the job classification and work location. Core business hours are from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm. Some jobs may require other hours of service. In such cases, the immediate supervisor will inform employees of the scheduled work hours.

The County uses UKG Ready as its time collection and time management tool. All employees will use UKG Ready to record time worked and request time away from work. All employees are assigned a UKG Ready user ID and should set up a password to the system.

All hourly employees will utilize UKG Ready for timekeeping purposes. Each employee should clock in at the beginning of each shift; clock out to go to lunch; clock in to return from lunch and clock out at the end of the shift. It is important to ensure that all hours worked by non-exempt employees are accurately recorded.

Employees may not log in or out of UKG Ready for another employee. It is the responsibility of each employee to report his/her time worked, meal periods and/or time off accurately and completely for each pay period. Employees cannot correct errors related to their timecard. If a correction is necessary, the employee must submit a request for corrections through UKG Ready.

Employees should request time away from work through the My Time Off widget in UKG Ready. Requests will then be sent electronically to supervisors for approval.

Any employee that willfully falsifies a time record will be subject to immediate dismissal.

### ***Canvassing or Solicitation***

Non-employees are not permitted to solicit verbally or by distribution of written material to Blount County employees or the general public for commercial purposes during work hours in work areas.

Solicitations by Blount County employees made to other Blount County employees are permitted only in non-work areas and during non-work hours.

Non-work areas include lobbies, hallways, elevators, stairs, sidewalks, parking areas, patios, lunchrooms, or other areas not regularly scheduled for work activities. Non-work hours include



before and after scheduled work hours, lunch periods, and approved breaks.

Employees or outside charitable organizations who wish to solicit Blount County employees for charitable purposes or to schedule activities in Blount County offices, must submit a written request to the County Mayor. The request must be approved by the County Mayor.

### ***Inclement Weather***

Blount County Government recognizes the fact that inclement weather and other emergencies can affect the ability to open for business and the employee's ability to report to work. All potential emergency situations cannot be foreseen and cannot be addressed by this policy.

Absences due to inclement weather require employees to make a personal judgment pertaining to safety in traveling to and from work. Loss of work time for this reason is charged to accrued compensatory time or annual leave. If no compensatory time or annual leave is available, the time is charged as leave without pay. If an employee makes the effort to report on time and actually reports within a reasonable period of time (based on the circumstances of the event), he/she will not be required to use leave time for the absence. Supervisors will determine if accrued leave must be used for late arrival. If the decision is made to close Blount County Offices, full-time employees will be paid for such time off and part-time employees will be paid for the scheduled hours on days when inclement weather closes offices.

In the event of inclement weather, the decision to close will be made on a case-by-case basis by the Blount County Mayor's Office, in collaboration with the Blount County Sheriff and Blount County Highway Superintendent. This decision will affect the Courthouse and other general County offices, with the exception of the Judges/Courts. The court system (including all Court Clerks) will make its own determination and announcement separately.

Fortunately, emergencies and inclement weather days are infrequent and, as always, the safety of our employees and citizens will be of paramount importance. The determination relative to closing will be made as soon as it is deemed to be reasonably necessary. Blount County Government will make every effort to remain open.

Closing/delayed opening information will be given to the three major television stations (WBIR, WATE, and WVLT) and WIVK (FM 107.7) as soon as it has been determined. Department Heads or their designees may determine closing for departments that work evenings and/or weekends (i.e. Library). If you have any questions about an official closing, you should contact your immediate supervisor.

### ***Telecommuting/Temporary Telecommuting***

In the event of an emergency such as a weather disaster or pandemic, the Blount County Government may allow or require employees to work from home temporarily to ensure continuity of county business.

### ***Personnel Files***

Tennessee law requires that "all state, County, and municipal records ... shall at all times, during business hours, be open for ... inspection by any citizen of Tennessee." The statute applies to personnel records and allows employees to review personnel files, as well as allowing any

member of the public to do so. (Medical records are not part of the personnel file.)

There is, however, restricted access to certain types of employee information. The following records of government employees will not be open for inspection by members of the public:

- unpublished telephone numbers
- bank account information
- social security numbers
- driver's license information - unless driving a vehicle is part of the employee's duties or incidental to the performance of the job
- the same information about an employee's immediate family
- any information relating to an employee's disability status or requests for job-related accommodations due to a disability

The personnel files are maintained in the Human Resources Department.

It is important that any change in personal information is reported promptly to the Human Resources Department. Other records, such as educational accomplishments, should also be reported as they are factors in consideration for future promotional opportunity. Be sure that the Human Resources Department always has:

1. Correct address and contact numbers such as telephone, cellular phone, etc.
2. Marital status
3. Increases or decreases in number of dependents
4. Any change affecting Social Security records
5. Correct beneficiary information.

### ***Performance Evaluations***

Managers will conduct formal performance evaluations periodically throughout the year. These evaluations should occur annually on or near an employee's anniversary hire date. The supervisor makes a rated evaluation based on the following competencies:

Job knowledge	Interpersonal Skills
Customer Service	Performance
Teamwork/Collaboration	Outcome orientation
Communication	Reliability

For supervisors:

Leads/Develops/Recognizes Staff  
Job Knowledge/Accountability

Salary increases are available at the beginning of each fiscal year, with approved funding by

County Commission, to those employees who receive an acceptable performance score of 3.0 or higher and have satisfied the appropriate introductory period.

### ***Bonus Policy***

From time to time and depending on the availability of funds and other factors, the County may provide incentive compensation to certain employees. To be eligible for the bonus payment, an employee must have completed the introductory period and be on the payroll at the time the bonus is paid.

All bonus award recipients must meet the following general criteria:

- The employee's accomplishments exceed the normal standards/expectations for the job.
- The employee has fulfilled all normal job duties in addition to performing added duties to accomplish a special project or achieve a certain goal.
- The employee serves as a role model for others, displaying desirable characteristics such as outstanding customer service, positive attitude, team leadership, etc.
- Length of service--A commitment to the County by their long-term service.

Decisions regarding the amount of a lump-sum bonus must be dependent upon the nature and complexity of the accomplishment(s) and the ability of the department to fund the payout. Managers should clearly communicate to the recognized employee(s) what outstanding achievement(s) led to the bonus recognition. The payment will be taxed at the federal withholding rate established by the IRS, in addition to other required taxes. A letter of commendation will be placed in the personnel file of employee(s) receiving a bonus, recognizing the accomplishment(s) of the employee(s).

The Bonus Plan is provided at the discretion of Blount County Government. The fact and amount of any incentive compensation are within the sole and absolute discretion of the County.

### ***Promotions, Transfers and Reassignments***

**Promotions:** Blount County continually strives to promote employees and fill job vacancies on an equal opportunity basis. Promotions are based on an objective evaluation of each vacancy and the candidates involved. Vacancies will be advertised and, where appropriate, Blount County will promote from within. Outside recruitment may be necessary based on the qualifications and skills of internal applicants. Salaries for employees earning promotions will be adjusted according to the County's compensation plan.

After promotion, employees must complete the standard six (6) month introductory period. A performance evaluation must be completed after the introductory period is complete and submitted to Human Resources. Employees earning a promotion will not be eligible for a step increase until the successful completion of the six (6) month introductory period for the new position.

Job postings may be viewed on the Blount County web site at <https://www.blounttn.org/420/Employment-Opportunities>.

**Transfers and Reassignments:** Blount County Government may, at its discretion, initiate or

approve employee job transfers. Current employees may request a voluntary job transfer by applying for a posted open position. To be eligible for a voluntary transfer, employees must be able to meet the requirements of the new position, must have satisfactory performance, must have held his or her current position for at least six months, and must have no adverse disciplinary actions during the same time period. Employees transferring to an open position are subject to the standard introductory period of six (6) months during which leave days are accrued according to the appropriate accrual schedule.

### **Step-Increases**

If approved by Blount County Commission, step-increases are awarded to employees annually. To qualify for step-increases, employees must have completed the required six (6) month introductory period and receive a positive performance evaluation earning at least a 3.0 or higher. This policy also applies to employees who receive promotions, are transferred, or reassigned.

### **Discipline Procedure**

In cases where an employee displays inappropriate conduct or poor performance--and the circumstances do not warrant prompt dismissal from employment--Blount County generally employs a progressive discipline process. If the circumstances and seriousness of the offense dictate, an employee may be promptly terminated without implementing the progressive discipline procedure. Misconduct involving dishonesty, violations of the law, violations of County policies or violations involving serious risk to the County's operation or the safety or well-being of oneself or others is grounds for immediate termination of employment. The facts and circumstances of each case will determine what actions up to and including termination from employment are appropriate. ***ALL forms of discipline MUST be documented by the Supervisor/Department Head/Elected Official and provided to Human Resources for placement in the employee's file. This documentation must include time, date of the meeting with the employee, signatures of the employee and the Supervisor/Department Head/Elected Official, and where appropriate, the performance issue and a Performance Improvement Plan.*** Although the County typically prefers to utilize the steps below, the County reserves the right to employ any level of discipline that it considers appropriate under the circumstances.

- **Verbal** - The first step is often a verbal warning from the supervisor which identifies the issue and the corrective action needed from the employee. The supervisor documents this step by providing appropriate documentation to the Human Resources Director for review and placement in the employee's personnel file. The employee may submit a statement for the file, if desired.
- **Written** - The second step is often a written warning, which appropriately describes the issue and the corrective action needed. The written warning will be discussed with the employee, and a copy of the warning will be sent to the Human Resources Director for review and placement in the employee's file. The employee may submit a statement for the file, if desired.
- **Adverse Action** - If previous attempts at correction have not been successful, the County may take a form of adverse action such as suspension, demotion, or termination. Adverse actions must be approved in advance by the Department Head/Elected Official and/or

### ***Personal Cell Phone Use***

Personal phone calls or text messages during working hours distract employees from job responsibilities and may be disruptive to coworkers. Employees should limit the placing or receiving of personal phone calls during working hours to those required in emergency situations. Employees are expected to inform friends and family members of this policy and will be held accountable for their actions under the disciplinary procedure. *Any information pertaining to work conducted from a personal device may be subject to subpoena or open records request(s).*

### ***Involuntary Separation of Employment***

Employment with Blount County Government is employment “at-will” and, as such, can be terminated by either party at any time, with or without cause. Terminations of employment initiated by the County are considered involuntary. ***ALL involuntary terminations should be approved by the Human Resources Department and the Department Head/Elected Official prior to the termination of employment.***

At the time of termination, employees will be advised regarding final pay as well as benefit termination and/or continuation. **ALL** County owned property must be returned at the time of separation. Such property includes keys, cellphones, laptops, identification cards, etc.

***ANY employee whose employment has been involuntarily terminated for cause (egregious offenses such as theft, ethics violations, etc.) will NOT be eligible for rehire by any department within Blount County Government.***

### ***Basic Work Rules***

The County has certain policies and rules to govern employee conduct and performance. The most important rule is to use "good sense" at all times. The County has established some basic work rules that must not be violated. Violation of these or similar rules may result in discipline up to and including immediate termination.

**Absenteeism or Tardiness:** When an employee fails to report to work as scheduled, it makes it more difficult to serve our citizens. Each employee plays an important role in our operation, and his or her absence or tardiness places an unnecessary burden on fellow employees. Employees are expected to report to work on time as scheduled, to limit breaks to the time allowed, and to stay on the job until the end of his or her scheduled workday.

**Breach of Confidence or Security:** Because of the nature of our work, we cannot tolerate any breaches of our security measures or confidential relationships.

**County Premises:** Except for areas that are open to the public, you are allowed on County premises only during your scheduled work hours, unless otherwise authorized by your supervisor.

**Damage to Property:** A tremendous investment has been made in our facilities and equipment to better serve our citizens and to make jobs easier. Deliberate, reckless, or careless damage to the County's property, or property of others, will not be tolerated. When appropriate, damage to property will be reported to law enforcement agencies.

**Discourtesy or Disrespect:** The County expects all employees to be courteous, polite and friendly to our citizens and fellow employees. No one should use profanity or show disrespect to a citizen or co-worker or engage in any activity which could harm our reputation.

**Fighting, Threats, or Weapons:** The County does not allow fighting, threatening words or conduct, loud or abusive language, or any other actions that could injure a citizen, fellow employee, or member of the public, regardless of where such words or actions occur.

**Fraud, Dishonesty or False Statements:** No employee or applicant may falsify or make any misrepresentations on or about any application, resume, document establishing identity or work status, medical record, insurance form, invoice, paperwork, time sheet, timecard, or any other document. Observation of such violations must be reported to supervisors immediately.

**Gambling:** Employees may not engage in any form of gambling on County premises.

**Harassment:** The County's No Harassment Policy, set forth in detail in this Handbook, strictly prohibits harassment based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, citizenship, age, handicap or disability, or any other category protected by law.

**Injuries and Accidents:** Every injury, no matter how slight, must be reported immediately to supervisors for first aid treatment or medical care. In the event of a job-related injury or accident, a provider must be chosen from the County's panel of physicians. The County may require a doctor's release before returning to work.

**Insubordination:** All employees have duties to perform and everyone, including your supervisor, must follow directions from someone. Employees must not refuse to follow the directions of a supervisor or member of management, unless the directions are unethical or a violation of policy. Unethical actions or requests and violations of policy must be reported to Human Resources. Employees witnessing unethical actions or being directed by their supervisor to carry out unethical actions or violations of policy may report those instances without fear of retaliation.

**Leaving Early and Returning Late:** Leaving early or returning late from breaks or lunch is prohibited. Leaving assigned work areas before, or preparing to leave before the end of scheduled shift, is prohibited.

**Misuse of Property:** Employees may not misuse or use without authorization, any equipment, vehicle, or other property of customers, vendors, other employees, or the County.

**Poor Performance:** The County expects all employees to make every effort to learn the assigned job and to perform at a satisfactory level. Employees who fail to maintain a satisfactory level of performance are subject to immediate termination.

**Shortages:** Employees who handle cash as a part of assigned job duties will be held accountable and may be required to pay for all shortages. Employees who handle cash as a part of their job duties may also be disciplined for such shortages, up to and including immediate termination.

**Sleeping or Inattention:** To protect the safety of all employees and to properly serve our customers, employees must be fully alert while on the job. Sleeping or inattention on the job will not be tolerated.

**Solicitation or Distribution:** Solicitation by an employee of another employee during the working hours of either employee for any reason is prohibited. Distribution of advertising materials, handbills, or other literature is always prohibited in all working areas. Solicitation and distribution by non-employees is always prohibited on County premises.

**Substance Abuse:** Substance abuse will not be tolerated. Employees testing positive for the presence of drugs or alcohol may be subject to immediate termination. Possession, use, sale, manufacture, purchase or working under the influence of drugs, alcohol or other intoxicants will not be tolerated.

**Theft:** Stealing or attempting to steal County property, property belonging to others, or the theft of time through falsification of timecards is strictly prohibited. Any County property removed from the premises requires written permission in advance from supervisor(s).

**Unlawful Activity:** Employees should not engage in any unlawful or unethical activity, including, but not limited to activity either on County property, or off the job, since such activity can adversely affect the County's reputation and/or the employee's ability to effectively perform the duties of his or her position.

**Unsafe Work Practices:** Blount County Government is committed to providing a safe place to work. A safety program has been established to ensure everyone understands the importance of safety. This program requires all employees to exercise good judgment and common sense during day-to-day work activities. Horseplay and practical jokes can cause accidents and injuries and, therefore, are prohibited.

**Violation of these or similar rules may lead to discipline, up to and including immediate termination.**

Obviously, this list is not all inclusive and there may be other circumstances for which employees may be disciplined or terminated. Any questions regarding these rules, or expectations of employees must be discussed with supervisor(s).

### ***Resignations***

Employees choosing to resign any position should notify immediate supervisor(s) or the Department Head in writing no less than ten (10) working days before the expected termination date. Failure to provide such a notice will be recorded in personnel files and may constitute ineligibility for rehire.

### ***Exit Interviews***

Employees resigning or retiring from any position with Blount County Government will be asked to participate in an exit interview. Employees terminating employment with the County will receive an electronic questionnaire. After completion of the questionnaire, an in-person interview will be scheduled.

### ***Reduction in Force***

A reduction in force is the release of an employee due to lack of funds, curtailment of work, or reorganization. If a reduction in force becomes necessary, the County will make decisions based on the needs of the Department(s) affected and the job knowledge, skill, work performance and seniority of the employees.

### ***Safety***

Blount County is concerned with employee health and safety while performing job tasks. Employees must observe all safety rules and report any unsafe activity to the Risk Management Department. Any workplace accidents, incidents, or injuries must be reported immediately to your direct supervisor and the Risk Management Department. If an employee is injured and unable to report the incident immediately, the report should occur as quickly as possible.

For additional information about any safety concern, please consult the Risk Management Department or the web site <https://www.blounttn.org/283/Risk-Management>.

### ***Workplace Chemicals***

Blount County Government maintains a Hazard Communication Program, including lists of all hazardous chemicals with which employees may work. The County also maintains copies of Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs) on each chemical. The MSDS explains procedures required to safely work with each chemical, as well as a written description of the Hazard Communication Program. Training will be provided before exposure to or working with a chemical declared "hazardous" by OSHA. Prior to working with chemicals, read container labels for instructions and/or safety requirements. Consult supervisors regarding MSDS requirements, including any safety equipment needed. Evaluate any unusual or non-routine task for chemical hazards. Report any safety issues or requirements to supervisors or managers, if necessary. Immediately notify supervisors of any chemical containers which are leaking or unlabeled. If uncertain regarding the disposal of a chemical, please consult supervisors or managers. When purchasing new chemicals, always obtain an MSDS and provide this information to supervisor(s) prior to use.

### ***Garnishments and Levies***

If a garnishment or similar proceedings are instituted against an employee, Blount County Government will deduct the required amount from the employee's paycheck.

### ***Alcohol and Drugs Policy***

Blount County Government is responsible for maintaining a safe and efficient working environment. Employees who use drugs or work while under the influence of drugs or alcohol present a safety hazard to themselves and fellow employees. Moreover, the use of drugs and alcohol by employees limits their ability to perform their work with the highest amount of efficiency. The purpose of this policy is to ensure employees the right to work in a drug and alcohol-free environment. Blount County Government makes an ongoing effort to maintain a drug free workplace. Employees are prohibited from being under the influence of drugs or alcohol, while on duty or on County property. Employees may not possess, sell, solicit, or receive illegal drugs or alcohol while on duty or on County property. Violation of this policy is grounds for immediate termination.

The County reserves the right to require employees, while on duty or while on County property, to



agree to inspections of all County property at any time. Searches of individual or personal property may be conducted as authorized by law. If an employee withholds consent to such an inspection, the County may discipline the employee, up to and including termination.

The County reserves the right to conduct drug/alcohol testing in the following situations:

- Applicants for employment
- Employees involved in an accident on the job that resulted in, or could have resulted in, substantial injury to person or property
- Reasonable suspicion

If an employee tests positive for the use of drugs or alcohol, a confirmatory test will be conducted. If the employee also tests positive on the confirmatory test, the County may discipline the employee, up to and including termination. If an employee refuses to submit to a drug test when requested, the County may discipline the employee up to and including termination of employment.

Certain employees are subject to federally required DOT drug and alcohol testing. For those employees, compliance with the federally mandated testing program is a condition of employment.

This policy is for the benefit of all employees and cooperation with the policy is required. Blount County Government believes this policy is necessary to ensure a safe and secure working environment.

#### **Applicant Drug Testing Policy**

All candidates receiving an offer of employment from Blount County are required to undergo testing for commonly abused controlled substances in accordance with this policy.

Candidates must advise the testing lab of all prescription drugs taken in the past month before the test and be prepared to show proof of such prescriptions to testing lab personnel.

Candidates refusing to submit to a drug test or who fail to show up for a drug test will no longer be considered for employment.

All records containing test results will be kept in medical files that are maintained separately from Blount County personnel files.

#### **Background Check Policy**

All offers of employment at Blount County Government are contingent upon clear results of a thorough background check. Background checks will be conducted on all final candidates.

- A background check will only be conducted on an applicant who has received a conditional offer of employment.
- Information sought in a background check will only be job-related.
- Information obtained during a background check will be kept confidential.
- Applicants must sign a written acknowledgement form granting the County permission to

- conduct a background check.
- Types of background checks
  - Criminal Background Checks –conducted on all applicants selected for employment.
  - Vehicle Driving Records – Verified if job duties require driving a vehicle on County business.
  - Credit History Checks – Conducted only if the primary job duties include handling money, finances or auditing.

Background investigations are conducted by a third-party vendor. The results are provided to the Human Resources Department for review, ensuring that the record of each candidate's background investigation is maintained in the personnel file.

### ***Tobacco Use***

Pursuant to the Non-Smoker Protection Act, Tennessee Code, tobacco use is prohibited in enclosed areas of County property, including but not limited to, cafeterias, employee lounges, hallways, meeting rooms, offices, restrooms, and company vehicles. Tobacco use may take place only in designated unenclosed areas. The use of e-cigarettes, vaping devices, and smokeless tobacco is prohibited in any enclosed areas of County property, as well. Tobacco use is also prohibited in any County owned vehicle. Any violation of this provision may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

### ***Electronic Communications***

This policy contains guidelines for the use, access, monitoring and disclosure of Electronic Communications created, sent, received, transmitted, or stored by employees using any County-provided communication system or equipment and employee-provided systems or equipment used either in the workplace or during working time. “Electronic Communications” include, among other things, messages, images, or any other information contained in e-mail, voice mail, fax machines, computers, personal digital assistants, pagers, telephones, cellular and mobile phones, Intranet, or Internet. (In the remainder of this policy, all these communication devices are collectively referred to as “Systems.”)

**Acceptable Uses of Our Systems:** Employees may use Systems to communicate internally with co-workers or externally with constituents, suppliers, vendors, advisors, and other business acquaintances for business purposes. The County provides employees with access to Systems to facilitate these business communications and to enhance productivity.

**Management's Right to Access Electronic Communications:** All Electronic Communications contained in Systems are County records. Although each employee may have an individual password to access Systems, the Systems belong to Blount County and the contents of the Systems and Electronic Communications conducted on the Systems are accessible by the County at all times for any business purpose. The Systems will be subject to periodic unannounced inspections and should be treated like other shared filing systems. The contents of Systems will be monitored by and disclosed to the County without further notice to employees. Thus, employees should not assume that Electronic Communications are confidential or private. Back-up copies of Electronic Communications in Systems will be maintained and referenced.

**Personal Use of Our Systems:** The County provides Systems to assist employees in the performance of their jobs. The County reserves the right and employees agree to permit the County to use, access, monitor and disclose all Electronic Communications on Systems without regard to content. Because employees' personal communications and information can be accessed without advance notice, employees should not use Systems for communication or information that employees do not want discussed with or known to third parties. For example, employees should not use Systems for gossip; personal information about themselves or others; for forwarding messages under circumstances likely to embarrass themselves or others; or for emotional responses to business correspondence or work situations. Employees also should not use Systems for such purposes as soliciting for commercial ventures, religious or personal causes, outside organizations, or other similar, non-job-related situations.

Although incidental and occasional personal use of Systems not interfering or conflicting with the County's business is permitted, personal communications in Systems are treated as all other Electronic Communications, and will be used, accessed, monitored, and disclosed by the County at any time without further notice.

Employees may not install any software on any County-provided System or copy software from any County-provided System without the prior written permission of our Systems supervisor. Involving the Systems Supervisor ensures that the County can manage the software on its Systems, prevent the introduction of computer viruses, and meet its obligations under any applicable software licenses and copyright laws. Computer software is protected from unauthorized copying and use by federal and state law. The unauthorized copying or use of computer software exposes the County and individual employees to substantial fines and/or imprisonment.

**Forbidden Uses of Our Systems:** Employees may not use Systems in a manner that violates the No Harassment Policy, Equal Employment Opportunity Policy, or other County policies. Employees may not use Systems in any way that may be deemed insulting, disruptive, obscene, offensive, or harmful to morale. Examples of forbidden transmissions include, among other things, sexually explicit messages, images, cartoons, or jokes; propositions; ethnic or racial slurs; or any other message or image that may be in violation of our No Harassment policy.

In addition, employees may not use Systems:

- to carry any defamatory, discriminatory, or obscene material
- in a manner that violates the terms of any telecommunications license or any laws governing transborder data flow including but not limited to laws dealing with data collection, protection, privacy, confidentiality and security
- in connection with any attempt to penetrate computer or network security of any County or other System, or to gain unauthorized access or attempted access to any other person's Electronic Communications Systems or equipment

- in connection with any infringement of another person's intellectual property rights, including but not limited to copyrights; and
- in connection with the violation or attempted violation of any law.

**Electronic Forgery:** Electronic forgery is defined as misrepresenting, disguising, or concealing a person's identity or another's identity in any way while using Electronic Communications; making changes to Electronic Communications without clearly indicating that such changes have been made and by whom; or using another person's account without prior written approval of the account owner and without identifying that the author is someone other than the account owner. Electronic forgery is not allowed for any purposes.

**Intellectual Property Rights:** Employees must always respect copyrights and trademarks of third parties and their ownership claims in images, text, video and audio material, software, information, and inventions. Employees should not copy, use, or transfer proprietary materials of others without appropriate authorization. Downloaded software and other copyrighted material may be subject to licensing obligations or restrictions. Software labeled as "freeware" or "shareware" may contain licensing restrictions that prohibit or limit the usage or commercialization of such items. If questions arise in this regard, contact the Systems Supervisor. The County will cooperate with the copyright holder and legal officials in all copyright matters.

**System Integrity, Security, and Encryption:** All Systems passwords and encryption keys must be available to the County and employees may not use passwords that are unknown to the County. Employees may not install password or encryption programs without the written permission of our Systems Supervisor and without turning over encryption keys to supervisors. Further, employees are prohibited from the unauthorized use of passwords and encryption keys belonging to other employees to gain access to the other employee's messages, information, or communications.

**Consequences of Violations of the County's Electronic Communications Policy:** Violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including **immediate termination of employment, as well as possible civil liabilities or criminal prosecution.** Where the County deems it appropriate, legal officials or other appropriate third parties may be advised of any illegal actions. The County will cooperate in investigations conducted by legal officials or appropriate third parties. The County will not retaliate against employees reporting violations or assisting with investigations of possible violations of this policy.

### **Social Media Policy**

Blount County understands that social media can be a fun and rewarding way to share events and opinions with family, friends, and co-workers. However, use of social media also presents certain risks and carries certain responsibilities. To assist employees with responsible decision-making pertaining to the use of social media, the following guidelines have been established. This policy applies to all employees.

In the rapidly expanding world of electronic communication, social media can mean many

things. Social media includes all means of communicating or posting information or content of any sort on the Internet, including but not limited to:

- Social Networking Sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc.)
- Microblogging sites (Twitter, Tumblr, etc.)
- Video and Photo Sharing Website/Applications (Flickr, YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok, etc.)

The term social media refers to the use of the web-based and mobile technologies that create interactive dialogue from communications. Social Media substantially changes communication between organizations, communities, and individuals because it is easily accessible.

Ultimately, employees are solely responsible for online posts. Before creating online content, consider some of the risks that are involved. Keep in mind that any conduct that adversely affects job performance, the performance of fellow employees or otherwise adversely affects citizens or Blount County's legitimate interests may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Whether or not employees participate in social media, it is the policy of Blount County Government that employees who participate in commentary understand there are two levels of social media engagement:

- **Official use** - social media engagement on behalf of Blount County Government on sites where we have an official Web presence; and
- **Personal use** - day-to-day use of social media sites by employees, not related to official duties. Employees must be mindful that in their personal participation in social media sites, they must not present themselves as being the official position of Blount County Government. Finally, employees must be aware that misconduct committed on a social media site may result in appropriate discipline.

Personal use of social media during working hours is frowned upon. The detection of personal social media engagement during working hours may result in appropriate discipline. When using social media, whether on behalf of Blount County Government or on their own time, employees are bound by the Blount County Code of Ethics.

### ***Workplace Violence Prevention Policy***

Blount County Government is committed to preventing workplace violence and to maintaining a safe work environment. Given the increasing violence in society in general, Blount County has adopted the following guidelines to deal with intimidation, harassment, or other threats of (or actual) violence that may occur during business hours or on its premises.

All employees should be treated with courtesy and respect at all times. No one other than law enforcement officials in the course of their duties, may bring dangerous or hazardous devices of substance on the premises of Blount County Government.

Conduct that threatens, intimidates, or coerces another employee, or a member of the public will not be tolerated. This prohibition includes all acts of harassment, including harassment that is

based on an individual's sex, race, age, or any characteristic protected by federal, state, or local law.

All threats of (or actual) violence, both direct and indirect, should be reported as soon as possible to immediate supervisor(s) or any other member of management. This includes threats by employees, as well as threats by vendors, solicitors, or other members of the public. When reporting a threat of violence, employees should be as specific and detailed as possible.

All suspicious individuals or activities must be reported as soon as possible to a supervisor. Employees should not place his-or-herself in danger. Employees seeing or hearing a commotion or disturbance in or around work areas should not try to intercede.

Blount County Government will promptly and thoroughly investigate all reports of threats of (or actual) violence and of suspicious individuals or activities. The identity of the individual making a report will be protected as much as is practical. To maintain workplace safety and the integrity of its investigation, the County may suspend employees, either with or without pay, pending investigation.

Anyone determined to be responsible for threats of (or actual) violence or other conduct that is in violation of these guidelines will be subject to prompt disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

Blount County Government encourages employees to bring their disputes or differences with other employees to the attention of their supervisor or the Human Resources Department before the situation escalates into potential violence. Blount County is eager to assist in the resolution of employee disputes and will not discipline employees for raising such concerns in a proper manner.

### ***Personal Appearance***

Our professional atmosphere is maintained, in part, by the image we present to our constituents and vendors. We expect all employees to present a neat, well-groomed appearance and a courteous disposition. These qualities go further than any other factors in making a favorable impression on the public and fellow workers. Employees should avoid extremes in dress. Flashy, skimpy or revealing clothing is unacceptable. Employees should dress in a businesslike manner. Good personal hygiene is important to maintain our constituents' favorable opinion as well as showing respect for your fellow employees. Accordingly, employees are expected to come to work in a clean condition.

### ***Grooming Standards***

- Hair should be neat and clean
- Hair length, style and color should be appropriate for your job
  - Any hair style which projects an unprofessional appearance should not be worn while working
- Facial hair (for males) should be clean and neatly trimmed
- Jewelry should be appropriate for the work setting, convey a professional appearance and should not be excessive
  - Visible piercings should be limited to the ear
  - No other body piercings that are visible are allowed

- Refrain from wearing perfumes or using lotions with a strong odor which could be offensive to coworkers
- Tattoos that are visible must always be covered during work hours.

### **Standards of Dress**

Blount County Government's dress code allows employees to wear business casual attire. This policy is an expression of trust in employees' judgement to dress in a manner reflecting the County's image. The term "business attire" is subjective, meaning different things to different people, referring to more comfortable business attire, appropriate for the business environment. Some examples of appropriate and inappropriate attire are as follows:

Appropriate	Inappropriate
<b>Pants</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skirts (no more than 2" above knee)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sweatpants</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slacks, khakis, capris</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shorts (depending on work environment)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jeans (acceptable on Fridays/more casual days)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leggings worn as pants / jeggings</li> </ul>
<b>Shirts</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collared or golf shirts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• T-shirts*</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oxford shirts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Halter tops/tank tops</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sweaters, blouses or dress shirts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crop tops, clothing showing midriffs</li> </ul>
<b>Shoes</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Casual shoes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flip flops</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loafers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Athletic shoes/tennis shoes (acceptable for more casual days)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open toe/open back shoes</li> </ul>	

\*T-shirts may be approved for specific events.

Certain staff members may be required to meet special dress, grooming and hygiene standards, such as wearing uniforms or protective clothing, depending on the nature of their job.

At the discretion of the Department Head, in special circumstances, staff members may be permitted to dress in a more casual fashion than is normally required. On these occasions, staff members are still expected to present a neat appearance and are not permitted to wear ripped, frayed or disheveled clothing or athletic wear. Likewise, tight, revealing, or otherwise workplace inappropriate dress is not permitted.

Employees are expected to always observe our Personal Appearance Policy while at work. Employees who report to work in unacceptable attire or appearance may be requested to leave work and return in acceptable attire or appearance. Such time off from work will be without pay for non-exempt employees.

Managers are responsible for ensuring employees project a professional image and adhere to our Personal Appearance Policy.

### ***Workers' Compensation Policy***

Any employee sustaining an injury or an illness during the course and scope of his or her employment which is determined to be compensable under the provisions of the Workers' Compensation Law shall be entitled to receive Workers' Compensation leave after the seven (7) day waiting period. This leave shall not be counted against any accrued sick leave that the employee has accumulated. The employee is not permitted to substitute any other paid leave. Benefits that are receivable by the employee will be determined by the provisions of the Workers' Compensation Law.

## **Leave Policies**

### ***Vacation – Policy vacated October 4, 2025***

Upon retirement, employees will be paid for the balance of their unused vacation. Employees who resign or are terminated will not be paid for unused vacation.

Blount County Government offers eligible employees' vacation with pay. Employees are encouraged to schedule sufficient time off for relaxation to promote employee wellness. An employee may use this leave for any purpose he or she wishes, including vacations, unpaid holidays, volunteerism, or personal pursuits. These absences should be scheduled in advance with supervisory approval.

All regular, full-time employees are eligible for vacation after 6 months of consecutive employment (introductory period).

The amount of vacation to which an employee becomes entitled is determined by the employee's length of full-time service. Vacation is granted or accrued, based on the employee's full-time date of hire.

### **Employees hired before January 1, 2019**

Except for your year of hire, vacation is awarded on January 1 of each year. Vacation is not accumulative and cannot be carried over to the next calendar year unless approved in writing by supervisor(s) due to operational demands. Vacation is awarded in accordance with the following schedule:

<b>Years of Service Completed</b>	<b>Number of Days Awarded</b>
1 year to 10 years	10 days or 2 weeks
11 years to 15 years	15 days or 3 weeks
16+ years	20 days or 4 weeks

For new employees, vacation will be awarded after successful completion 6 months continuous service with Blount County Government and based on the following schedule:

<b>Service Milestones during First Year</b>	<b>Number of Days Awarded</b>
Completion of 6-month introductory period	5 days or 1 week
One-year anniversary date	5 days or 1 week



### Example

**Date of Hire ----- March 5, 2018**

**6 Months of Employment----- September 5, 2018**

- Eligible Vacation Days-----5 days (1 week)

**Anniversary Date of Hire ----- March 5, 2019**

- Eligible vacation days -----additional 5 days (1 week)

**On the following January 1<sup>st</sup> ----- January 1, 2020**

- Eligible Vacation Days ----- 10 days (2 weeks)

#### Employees hired after January 1, 2019

Eligible employees begin accruing vacation after 6 months of consecutive employment. Employees may begin using accrued time as soon as it is available each anniversary year. Vacation is accrued during periods of active employment; therefore, not accrued during an employee's unpaid personal leave of absence or unpaid time off. At the discretion of the Elected Official/Department Head, employees can be advanced up to five (5) days of vacation each year. The days awarded in advance can be taken individually or consecutively. Alternatively, employees can take time off prior to earning paid vacation/annual leave by submitting a request for unpaid time off. Once earned, vacation shall be paid as used, at the employee's current rate of pay and based on employee's regular work schedule. Employees hired after January 1, 2019, may carry over up to five (5) days, one (1) week, into each anniversary year.

#### **For employees working 30 hours per week**

<b>Years of Service Completed</b>	<b>Total Number of Hours Annually</b>	<b>Hours Accrued Per Pay Period</b>
0 – 6 months	0 hours	0 hours
6 months – 1 year	30 hours	2.3077 hours
1 – 10 years	60 hours	2.3077 hours
11 – 15 years	90 hours	3.4615 hours
16+ years	120 hours	4.6154 hours

#### **For employees working 37.5 hours per week**

<b>Years of Service Completed</b>	<b>Total Number of Hours Annually</b>	<b>Hours Accrued Per Pay Period</b>
0 – 6 months	0 hours	0 hours
6 months – 1 year	37.5 hours	2.8846 hours
1 – 10 years	75 hours	2.8846 hours
11 – 15 years	112.50 hours	4.3269 hours
16+ years	150 hours	5.7692 hours

#### **For employees working 40 hours per week**

Years of Service Completed	Total Number of Hours Annually	Hours Accrued Per Pay Period
0 – 6 months	0 hours	0 hours
6 months – 1 year	40 hours	3.0769 hours
1 – 10 years	80 hours	3.0769 hours
11 – 15 years	120 hours	4.6154 hours
16+ years	160 hours	6.1538 hours

### **Annual Leave – Policy effective October 5, 2025**

#### **Annual Leave**

Employees who work 30 hours or more per week on a regular basis are eligible for Annual Leave. The following guidelines apply:

- Annual Leave can be taken anytime during the calendar year (with prior approval) from Jan. 1 through Dec. 31;
- Employees involved in military training or on a leave of absence, will continue to earn leave while being paid;
- Leave is accrued based on the number of paid hours in a pay period, not to exceed the employee's regularly scheduled hours; and
- The accrual rates increase each year as shown in the table below. The accrual factor increase takes effect the first pay period following the employment anniversary date.

**Annual Leave  
Accrual Factor Table**

Years of Service	Accrual Factor	Accrued hours per year*	Carryover Max per year*
<1	0.04616	90	45
1	0.05000	97.5	48.8
2	0.05385	105	52.5
3	0.05769	112.5	56.3
4	0.06154	120	60
5	0.06539	127.5	63.8
6	0.06846	133.5	66.8
7	0.07154	139.5	69.8
8	0.07462	145.5	72.8
9	0.07769	151.5	75.8
10	0.08077	157.5	78.8
11	0.08231	160.5	80.3
12	0.08385	163.5	81.8
13	0.08539	166.5	83.3
14	0.08692	169.5	84.7
15	0.08846	172.5	86.2
16	0.08923	174	87

17	0.09000	175.5	87.7
18	0.09077	177	88.5
19	0.09154	178.5	89.2
20+	0.09231	180	90

\*Based on 37.5-hour workweek

**To calculate the earned hours of Annual Leave:**

- **From the Accrual Factor Table, find the line for the number of years employed;**
- **Multiply the Annual Factor by the number of hours in a bi-weekly pay period (60,75, 80, etc.);**
  - **The answer is the number of hours of Annual Leave earned per pay period**
- **To determine how many days of Annual Leave earned per year, multiply the total hours of Annual Leave per period by 26 (number of pay periods per year), then divide the resulting number by the number of scheduled hours in your workday (7.5, 8, 10, etc.)**

**Example: Jane Doe has been employed two years and works 37.5 hours per week (75 hours per pay period)**

**$.0538465 \times 75 = 4.035$  hours of leave earned per pay period**

**$4.035 \times 26 = 104.91$  hours of leave earned per year**

**$104.91 / 7.5 = 14$  days of Annual Leave earned per year**

Annual Leave must be taken in 15-minute increments.

Annual Leave will accrue from the first day of employment but does become available until satisfactory completion of the 6-month introductory period.

Annual Leave may not be taken before it is earned.

The number of accrued leave hours to be used for one day of leave is equal to the number of scheduled hours of work for that day of leave. For example, if an employee works four 10-hour days per work week, he/she must use 10 hours of Annual Leave to have the entire day off. If the work day is 7.5 hours, then 7.5 hours of Annual Leave must be taken to equal one day.

Annual Leave is intended to be used in the year it is earned, but a portion of it may be carried over for use in the following year. The carryover maximum is 50% of the hours accrued annually based on years of service. For example, a 7.5-hour employee in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year of employment will accrue 105 hours and may carryover 52.5 unused hours at their anniversary date. Carryover hours are not cumulative.

- Annual Leave that exceeds the maximum carryover limit will be forfeited; and
- Authorized time off for Annual Leave will not be considered as working time for calculating weekly overtime; and
- Employees meeting the County's qualifications for retirement are entitled to payment for the unused Annual Leave balance at retirement. Fifty (50) percent of the unused Annual Leave is paid at voluntary termination with proper notice given. Payment is based on the rate of compensation received at the time of the retirement or resignation. **Employees involuntarily terminated, or any**

***employee giving less than adequate notice or any other termination reason, will not be paid for any unused annual leave; and***

- Annual leave cannot be converted into cash; and
- The accrual factor will reset for rehired employees; and
- Payment for unused Annual Leave at retirement is not treated as compensation for the Tennessee Consolidated Retirement System (TCRS).

### ***Annual Leave Scheduling Conflicts***

Annual leave scheduling conflicts will be resolved fairly and appropriately as management sees fit. Generally, with all other factors being equal, preference will be given to the employee who makes the earliest request. Other legitimate factors may be considered, including seniority and the amount of annual leave previously taken by the employees involved.

### ***Minimum Annual Leave Increments***

Eligible employees may take annual leave, with prior supervisory approval, at times that best meet the needs of the department. Employees must take annual leave in increments of at least fifteen minutes. It is each supervisor's responsibility to monitor such absences and to ensure that absences do not become excessive in relation to the hours worked by the employee.

### ***Notice of absence***

Generally, requests for annual leave must be submitted to the supervisor at least one week in advance. Employees may have the right in certain circumstances to make leave requests under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or other laws on shorter notice. If the employee is requesting annual leave for family or medical purposes, the employee must make sure that this purpose is made clear to supervisors. The supervisor must approve any exceptions to this provision or any conflicts in scheduling. A department may impose additional guidelines as necessary to ensure efficiency and adequate staffing levels.

### ***Annual Leave Scheduling***

Leave requests are submitted electronically through UKG Ready. Employees must submit annual leave requests to supervisors and receive approval prior to taking the leave.

### ***Sick Leave Accrual***

Full-time employees will receive full pay during incapacity caused by illness when accumulated sick leave is available, approved and taken. Employees may accumulate sick leave; however, it is non-compensable upon the employee's termination of employment. In the event of death, a maximum of up to 30 days accumulated sick leave will be paid to the employee's estate. An employee may be paid up to 30 days of accumulated sick leave immediately prior to retirement without the need for a doctor's statement.

### **Earning and Accumulating Sick Leave**

- Employees will earn one sick day per month of employment, beginning on the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month following the 30th day of employment.
- Sick days will be allocated to the employees on the 1<sup>st</sup> of every month.
- There is no maximum on the accumulation of sick days.

- Accumulated unused sick days can be certified to be counted toward retirement credit with TCRS.

### ***Use of Sick Leave***

An employee may use sick leave for absence due to his or her own illness or injury or that of an immediate family member defined as:

1. The employee's spouse
2. The employee's parents
3. The spouses' parents
4. Children or children under legal guardianship of the employee and/or spouse

Sick leave may also be used for appointments with a licensed doctor, dentist or recognized practitioner.

### ***Documentation of sick leave***

Employees are required to notify their immediate supervisor prior to their scheduled start time if sick leave is needed. After three (3) consecutive days of absence, a doctor's excuse may be required. The Department Head may also request a doctor's statement anytime they deem necessary.

### ***Exhaustion of sick leave***

Employees who have exhausted accumulated sick leave will not receive financial compensation for additional days needed due to illness or injury. For any additional time needed, the employee will be considered on leave without pay unless the employee has annual leave or compensatory time available. The employee may request the additional sick leave needed be credited against the balance of annual leave or compensatory time.

### ***Sick Leave Bank Guidelines***

The purpose of the Employee Sick Leave Bank is to provide sick leave to full-time employees of Blount County Government who have suffered a qualifying personal illness, injury, or disability. All full-time employees of Blount County Government who are entitled to sick leave under the Sick Leave Policy will be eligible to participate in the Sick Leave Bank provided they meet the requirements:

1. Worked for one (1) continuous year.
2. Have a minimum of six (6) accumulated sick leave days.
3. Three (3) days of sick leave will be deducted from his or her personal accumulation and deposited to the Sick Leave Bank.

Employees electing to participate will do so during the Open Enrollment period with the effective date of February 1<sup>st</sup>. On January 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, each member will be assessed one (1) day to add to the bank. ALL donations of sick leave to the Sick Leave Bank are non-refundable and non-transferable, including initial days donated, yearly donation and any assessed days.

If at any time the number of hours in the Sick Leave Bank is less than one (1) day per member, the Trustees will assess each member one (1) or more (up to a maximum of 3) days of

accumulated sick leave. If a member has no accumulated sick leave at the time of assessment, the first earned day(s) will be donated as they are accrued by the employee.

By written notice to the Trustees, a member may withdraw from the Sick Leave Bank participation on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Membership withdrawal, however, will result in the forfeiture of all days contributed. Members of the Sick Leave Bank will be eligible to apply to the Bank for sick leave, only after having been a member of the Bank for thirty (30) calendar days.

Use of the Sick Leave Bank is restricted to illness, surgery or accident resulting in an absence of ten or more consecutive working days. A member must first utilize ALL accumulated annual leave, compensatory leave, or sick leave before receiving leave from the Sick Leave Bank. After utilizing the Member's available leave, receipt of leave from the Sick Leave Bank may begin.

Granted leave from the Bank, approved by the Trustees, will be awarded as needed not exceeding twenty (20) working days for which the individual applicant would have otherwise lost pay. Applicants may submit requests for an extension of such leave grants before or after prior grants expire. The maximum number of days any participant may receive in any fiscal year, which presently begins on July 1 and ends on June 30, is sixty (60). In the event a member is physically or mentally unable to make a request to the Sick Leave Bank for use of sick leave days, any member of the immediate family or agent may file the request.

A physician's statement stating that the illness or accident will require more than a ten (10) day absence is **required** as a part of the application to receive sick leave days from the Sick Leave Bank. Also, a physician's statement of condition is required from any member requesting additional leave beyond the first twenty (20) days. Refusal to comply will result in denial of the pending request for use of sick leave days from the Bank.

Sick leave granted to a member from the Sick Leave Bank need not be repaid by the individual except at such time as it is deemed necessary to uniformly assess all members.

Grants of sick leave from the Sick Leave Bank will not be made to any members due to elective and/ or cosmetic surgery, pregnancy or any condition relating to pregnancy, illness of any member of the participant's family, or during any period the member is receiving workers' compensation.

A member will lose the right to obtain the benefits of the Sick Leave Bank by:

- (a) Resignation or termination of employment with Blount County Government;
- (b) Cancellation of participation which is effective on January 1<sup>st</sup> of the next year;
- (c) Refusal to honor such assessment as may be required by the Trustees;
- (d) Retirement;
- (e) Any documented proof of fraud or misrepresentation of facts in making application for use of sick leave from the Sick Leave Bank; or
- (f) Changing to part-time employment status. (29 hours or less per week)

Sick leave used from the Sick Leave Bank shall not constitute creditable service for sick and annual leave accrual or for longevity purposes. The Board of Trustees may vote to expel any member if the member is found to have violated any of the provisions set forth herein.

Any member who receives Sick Leave Bank benefits using fraud or any misrepresentation of facts shall be liable for the reimbursement of all salary and benefits expended by the bank. In the event the Sick Leave Bank is dissolved, the total number of days on deposit shall be returned to the participating members and credited to their personal sick leave accumulated in proportion to the number of days each has contributed individually. Days returned under this section and credited to the individual participants accumulation shall be rounded to the nearest one-half (1/2) days.

***Please refer to the Blount County Government Procedures Manual for Sick Bank application and appeal procedures.***

#### ***Personal Leave – Policy vacated October 4, 2025***

After successful completion of the 6-month introductory period, all full-time regular employees may be entitled to three (3) days of paid personal leave per year. Personal leave is not accumulative and may not be carried over into the following calendar year. The only exception is during the first year of employment (defined as anniversary year) up to 3 days of personal leave time may be carried over, if approved, into the following calendar year.

#### **Example**

<u>Date of hire</u>	<u>Completion of introductory period</u>	<u>Eligible</u>
March 2, 2008	September 5, 2008	3 days

Full-time regular employees will be eligible for three (3) days personal leave after six (6) months of employment. The January following, the employee is entitled to three days personal leave annually.

The scheduling/use of personal leave is approved at the discretion of the Department Head/Elected Official.

***\*\*Earned but unused personal days are not paid upon separation of employment.***

#### ***Bereavement Leave / Funeral Leave***

In the event of a death in the employee's immediate family, (immediate family is defined as spouse, parents, spouses' parents, children, step-children, brother, sister, grandparents, grandchildren, and spouses' grandparent) the employee is allowed three (3) working days of paid bereavement leave. If additional leave is needed, two (2) sick days may be used. The Department Head may request the employee to provide written documentation indicating the name of deceased, relationship to employee and dates of bereavement leave. **\*\*Please note that Blount County Government does not allow the purchase of flowers and/or donations for the death of an employee or family member of an employee from operating funds of the department.**

#### ***Holidays***

Blount County publishes a holiday schedule each year to be uniformly observed, unless otherwise determined by the Department Head/Elected Official to avoid interruption of a public service. Full-time, regular, and introductory employees who are not required to work on the holiday will receive their regular rate of pay for the day. If a holiday falls within an employee's scheduled annual leave period, annual leave time will not be charged for the holiday. Non-exempt employees

required to work the holiday will be compensated with holiday pay, (time and a half) unless otherwise specified or provided for.

***\*\*All employees must work or utilize paid time off for the day before and the day after a holiday to be paid for the holiday unless prior approval for the absence was granted.***

Part-time employees are not eligible to receive holiday pay.

### **Leaves of Absence**

All full-time regular employees may be granted a period of personal leave without pay wholly at the discretion of the Elected Official or Department Head.

- Leaves of absence must be requested in writing to the Department Head/Elected Official. This request should be made enough in advance to provide supervisors sufficient time to assess workload and consider the planned leave of other employees. The Department Head/Elected Official reserves the right to deny or cancel leave of absence.
- Elected Officials may elect to disallow leaves of absence within their department. Employees must verify the allowance of leaves of absence with supervisors within the department. If leaves of absence are allowed, the leave request must be approved in writing. The written approval must be given to the Human Resources/Payroll Department.

### **Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)**

Blount County offers leave under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for eligible employees.

**Eligibility:** Employees who have worked for Blount County Government at least one year and for 1,250 hours during the twelve (12) month period preceding the request are eligible to take up to twelve (12) weeks of unpaid leave annually when the absence is necessitated by any of the following circumstances:

- the birth or placement for adoption or foster care of a son or daughter
- employee's own serious health condition that prevents employees from performing the essential job functions
- the serious health condition of a son or daughter, parent, or spouse under the care of the employee
- because of any qualifying exigency arising out of the fact that the employee's spouse, son, daughter, or parent is a covered service member on active duty, or who has been called to active duty
- to care for a covered service member with a serious injury or illness if the employee is the spouse, child, parent, or next of kin of the service member (leave period for military caregivers is 26 weeks).

**Applications:** Applications (available in the Human Resources Department) for FMLA leave must be submitted in writing. Applications should be submitted at least thirty (30) days before the leave is to start, or as soon as possible if leave is not foreseeable. Employees must provide the County with an appropriate medical certification when requesting FMLA leave.

**Certification:** Requests for leave related to the employee's own serious health condition, or to



care for the serious condition of a son or daughter, parent or spouse, require certification from the treating healthcare provider. Healthcare Provider Certification Forms are available from the Human Resources Department.

**Measuring:** Blount County has chosen the "measured forward" method that entitles employees to 12 weeks of leave during the year beginning on the first date the FMLA leave is taken after the previous 12-month period ends.

*Example: The 12-month period begins Sept. 1, 2020, if that is the first day of FMLA leave. If all FMLA leave is exhausted during the following 12-month period, the next date FMLA leave could be taken would be Sept. 1, 2021.*

**Intermittent or Reduced-Time Leave:** FMLA leave can be taken on an intermittent or reduced-time basis under certain circumstances. Employees may request intermittent or reduced leave for the following reasons:

- When medically necessary to care for a seriously ill family member, or because of the employee's own serious health condition.
- For the birth or placement of a child for adoption or foster care. Intermittent or reduced time leave shall not exceed 12 weeks combined if both spouses are employed by the County.

Only the amount of leave taken while on intermittent/reduced schedule leave may be charged as FMLA leave. If employees need intermittent/reduced schedule leave for planned medical treatment, the employee must work with supervisors to schedule the leave, so it does not unduly disrupt the department's operations.

The County may, in its sole discretion, temporarily transfer an employee on intermittent leave to an alternative job with equivalent pay and benefits that accommodate recurring periods of leave better than the employee's regular job.

**Serious Health Condition:** "Serious health condition" means an illness, injury, impairment, or physical or mental condition that involves:

- any period of incapacity or treatment connected with inpatient care (i.e., an overnight stay) in a hospital, hospice, or residential medical care facility; or
- a period of incapacity requiring absence of more than three calendar days from work that also involves continuing treatment by (or under the supervision of) a healthcare provider; or
- any period of incapacity due to pregnancy, or for prenatal care; or
- any period of incapacity (or resulting treatment) due to a chronic serious health condition (e.g., asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, etc.); or
- a period of incapacity that is permanent or long-term due to a condition for which treatment may not be effective (e.g., Alzheimer's, stroke, terminal diseases, dialysis, etc.), or,
- any absences to receive multiple treatments (including any period of recovery) by, or on referral by, a healthcare provider for a condition that likely would result in incapacity of more than three consecutive days if left untreated (e.g., chemotherapy, physical therapy,

dialysis, etc.).

**Medical/Dental Insurance Premiums:** During FMLA leave, the County will continue to pay its portion of the medical/dental insurance premiums. Employees must continue to pay the employee portion of the premium. Employee portions of insurance premiums should be paid continually according to the payroll schedule (i.e., semi-monthly).

Employees who do not return to work at the end of FMLA leave may be required to reimburse the County for payment of insurance premiums, unless the employee's failure to return is due to a serious health condition which prevents the performance of the job or circumstances beyond the employee's control. Employee's may then choose to elect COBRA coverage. Sufficient notice will be given to the employee at the end of FMLA when and if this event occurs. Employees will be responsible for any other elected contributions while out on FMLA.

**Accrued Leave:** Employees are required to use all available paid time off during FMLA leave. Accrued leave and FMLA leave are used at the same time; employees do not take accrued leave first and then take FMLA.

During unpaid leave, employees will not accrue employment benefits, such as annual leave, sick leave, pension, etc. while on family and medical leave unless the employee is receiving regular pay by using available paid time off.

Employment benefits accrued through the day the family leave of absence begins will not be lost.

**Return to Work:** Upon returning from family and medical leave, eligible employees will normally be restored to their job, or an equivalent job with equivalent pay, benefits, and other employment terms and conditions.

Use of family and medical leave cannot result in the loss of any employment benefit that employees earned or were entitled to before using family and medical leave.

While on FMLA leave, employees must periodically update (if possible) supervisors or Department Heads regarding medical status/condition and indicate an intended to return to work date. Appropriate forms must be submitted to Human Resources to initiate FMLA leave or to return to active status. The Return-to-Work Release form provided with the initial FMLA application MUST be returned to Human Resources prior to returning to work. Failure to submit the Return-to-Work Release for will delay returning to work!

**Extensions:** Family and medical leave is available for twelve (12) weeks. The County may, at its discretion, approve extended personal leave without pay beyond that time. Any such leave will not be job protected. Requests for extended personal leave must be submitted to the Human Resources Department. If possible, requests for extended leave should be submitted two weeks in advance of the previously scheduled return to work date.

### **Maternity Leave**

Pregnancy, childbirth, and related conditions will be treated as any other temporary medical disability regarding leave policies. Leave is available under the same terms and conditions as for other similar

purposes, for a period not to exceed four (4) months which is counted as part of Family Medical Leave (see *Family Medical Leave*)

1. The employee must have been employed by the County for at least twelve (12) consecutive months as a full-time employee.
2. In cases of adoption or foster care, the child must be under the age of one (1) year at the time of placement.
3. The employee must give the County at least three (3) months advance notice of the anticipated date the leave is to begin, except in cases of emergency; the entitlement to leave begins on the date of birth or placement and ends six weeks thereafter.

### ***Parental Leave***

An employee who has been employed by Blount County Government for at least twelve (12) consecutive months as a full-time employee, may be absent from employment for a period not to exceed four (4) months in connection with pregnancy and childbirth. Eligibility for parental leave under this policy and the Family and Medical Leave policy counts against your entitlement under both laws. The specific content of the Tennessee Parental Leave Act found at T.C.A. § 4-21-408 is reproduced as follows:

Leave for adoption, pregnancy, childbirth and nursing an infant:

Employees who have been employed by the same employer for at least twelve (12) consecutive months as full-time employees, as determined by the employer at the job site or location, may be absent from such employment for a period not to exceed four (4) months for adoption, pregnancy, childbirth and nursing an infant, where applicable, referred to as "leave" in this section. Regarding adoption, the four-month period shall begin at the time an employee receives custody of the child.

Employees who give at least three (3) months' advance notice to their employer of their anticipated date of departure for such leave, their length of leave, and their intention to return to full-time employment after leave, shall be restored to their previous or similar positions with the same status, pay, length of service credit and seniority, wherever applicable, as of the date of their leave.

Employees who are prevented from giving three (3) months' advance notice because of a medical emergency that necessitates that leave begin earlier than originally anticipated shall not forfeit their rights and benefits under this section solely because of their failure to give three (3) months' advance notice.

Employees who are prevented from giving three (3) months' advance notice because the notice of adoption was received less than three (3) months in advance shall not forfeit their rights and benefits under this section solely because of their failure to give three (3) month's advance notice.

Leave may be with or without pay at the discretion of the employer. Such leave shall not affect the employees' right to receive annual leave, sick leave, bonuses, advancement, seniority, length of service credit, benefits, plans or programs for which the employees were eligible at the date of

their leave, and any other benefits or rights of their employment incident to the employees' employment position; provided, that the employer need not provide for the cost of any benefits, plans or programs during the period of such leave, unless such employer so provides for all employees on leaves of absence.

If an employee's job position is so unique that the employer cannot, after reasonable efforts, fill that position temporarily, then the employer shall not be liable under this section for failure to reinstate the employee at the end of the leave period.

The purpose of this section is to provide leave time to employees for adoption, pregnancy, childbirth and nursing the infant, where applicable; therefore, if an employer finds that the employee has utilized the period of leave to actively pursue other employment opportunities or if the employer finds that the employee has worked part-time or full-time for another employer during the period of leave, then the employer shall not be liable under this section for failure to reinstate the employee at the end of the leave.

Whenever the employer shall determine that the employee will not be reinstated at the end of the leave because the employee's position cannot be filled temporarily or because the employee has used the leave to pursue employment opportunities or to work for another employer, the employer shall so notify the employee.

Nothing contained within the provisions of this section shall be construed to:

- Affect any bargaining agreement or County policy that provides for greater or additional benefits than those required under this section
- Apply to any employer who employs fewer than one hundred (100) full-time employees on a permanent basis at the job site or location
- Diminish or restrict the rights of teachers to leave pursuant to title 49, chapter 5, part 7, or to return or to be reinstated after leave

***Military Leave (approved by County Commission 05/17/2018)***

Employees who are members of any U.S. military reserve component, including the Tennessee Army and the Air National Guard, will be granted a leave of absence for all periods of military service during which they are engaged in the performance of duty or training for this state or for the United States of America under competent orders.

While on leave, the employees will receive their regular compensation for a period not to exceed twenty (20) working days per calendar year, plus any additional days that may result from a call to active state duty by the Governor. Such requested leave shall be supported with copies of the armed forces order.

If a holiday occurs during the employee's leave, he/she will receive holiday pay.

An employee required to report for military training must provide the appropriate orders to their supervisor. A Change of Status form must be completed and forwarded, along with a copy of the employee's military orders, to the Human Resources Department.

Any benefits the employee has elected will be suspended if and when the employee's military coverage takes effect. The employee will continue to pay the monthly premiums until military benefit coverage takes effect. The employee will be allowed to resume benefit coverage (with no waiting period) with Blount County upon his/her return to employment with the County.

### ***Jury Duty or Court Appearance***

When employees must miss work due to jury or witness duty, the employee will be excused from work. Notice must be given to direct supervisors. Witness duty must pertain to job-related business for excused absence with regular pay. This also includes subpoenas to court on non-work-related issues.

Employees working day shifts, and whose jury service was under three hours, are expected to return to work upon being released from service. Employees working second or third shift are excused from the shift before their first day of jury duty, and if they have served for 3 hours or more on the day they are released, are also excused from the first shift that follows their release from jury duty.

Blount County Government employees are paid his or her regular wages in addition to jury duty pay received from the government unit involved. Employees are allowed to keep the jury duty pay.

### ***Voting Leave/Elections***

In accordance with Tennessee State Law, employees entitled to vote in an election held in this state may be absent from work on the day of the election for a reasonable amount of time, not to exceed three (3) hours.

Employees whose shift begins three (3) or more hours after the opening of the polls or ends three (3) or more hours before the polls close in the County in which the employee resides are ineligible for this leave.

For time off for voting, employees must arrange the time off with direct supervisors before 12:00 noon of the day before the election. Supervisors may select the hours during which employees may be absent for voting.

## **Employee Benefits**

### ***Benefits Eligibility***

Employees working a minimum of thirty (30) hours per week are eligible for benefits. These benefits currently include medical coverage, dental coverage, and supplemental benefit options.

Employees whose hours drop below thirty (30) hours per week on a regular basis will lose eligibility for medical/dental and other insurance coverage. The employee and all covered dependents will be offered COBRA. Employees are responsible for listing only dependents that are eligible for coverage as defined by the plan rules. If a covered dependent becomes ineligible based on the plan rules, it is the employee's responsibility to notify Human Resources immediately.

### ***Benefits Effective and Termination Dates***

Benefits begin the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month after thirty (30) days of employment. For example, if the hire

date is January 18<sup>th</sup> coverage will begin on March 1<sup>st</sup>.

Because benefit premiums are paid current, the termination effective date for benefits is based on the number of paychecks received in a month. For example, employees receiving one (1) check during the month in which employment terminates, benefit coverage will end on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month. Employees receiving two (2) or more checks during the month, benefit coverage will end on the last day of the month.

### ***Medical/Dental Coverage***

Currently, employees must enroll for coverage within thirty (30) days of employment or an eligible qualifying event. Temporary employees, seasonal employees, and interns are not eligible for medical/dental coverage. Complete benefit packets are provided at new hire orientation. Additional packets may be obtained by contacting Human Resources.

Information regarding the current medical/dental plan and premiums is available from Human Resources or on the web site <https://www.blounttn.org/761/Blount-County-Government-Benefits>.

### ***Identification Cards***

Identification cards for employees enrolling in benefits will be mailed to the employee's home address. Identification cards can be printed or downloaded by visiting [www.blountcountybenefits.com](http://www.blountcountybenefits.com).

### ***Annual Open Enrollment Period***

Medical and dental plans, benefit designs, eligibility rules, and premiums are subject to change each plan year based on the previous year's claims experience. Announcements concerning changes for the upcoming plan year are made during the annual open enrollment period each fall. Employees are required to review notices, home mailings, and department memos for information about the benefits for the upcoming year. Typically, the enrollment/change period occurs in the Fall of each year. It is the employee's responsibility to stay informed of benefit changes.

### ***Benefit Premiums/Payroll Deductions***

Employees are responsible for reviewing paychecks to ensure the appropriate benefit premiums have been deducted. Deductions will begin the first pay period of the month in which coverage begins. Benefit premiums are deducted from 24 pay periods per year. Employees on unpaid leave or no-pay status must contact Human Resources to make payment arrangements. *Failure to pay premiums while on no-pay status will result in the loss of coverage!*

### ***COBRA***

If insurance coverage is discontinued due to termination of employment, a reduction in work hours, or other qualifying event, the employee and any covered dependents may be eligible to continue coverage through COBRA.

For a full explanation of COBRA terms and eligibility, contact Human Resources or refer to the "General COBRA Notice" received at the time of hire.

### ***Employee Assistance Program (EAP)***

Blount County Government is very concerned with the physical and emotional well-being of its

employees and their families. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides up to five (5) free and confidential counseling sessions per topic to employees and the members of the household who are dealing with difficult issues.

If you have questions about the EAP or would like more information regarding any of the programs, contact Human Resources.

### ***Health Savings Accounts (HSA)***

Health Savings Accounts (HSA) are savings accounts that allow employees to save money for future qualifying medical expenses through pre-tax payroll deduction or lump-sum deposits. Employees must be enrolled in a Qualified High Deductible Health Plan (QHDHP) in order to participate in the HSA (Bronze Plan). For more information on Health Savings Accounts please contact the Human Resources Department at 865-273-5780.

### ***Flexible Spending Accounts***

Flexible spending accounts allow an employee's medical out-of-pocket expenses and dependent care expenses to be paid with "before tax" dollars. Employees electing this benefit have a selected amount deducted from each paycheck. The maximum annual contributions to FSAs follow IRS guidelines.

Membership in Blount County's medical plan is NOT required to participate in a flexible spending account. Employees may enroll at the time of hire or during the annual open enrollment period. Re-enrollment is required each year to continue participation.

### ***Change in Status***

Employees are required to report personal changes and/or changes in work status to Human Resources within thirty (30) days of any status change. This includes:

- dependent status change,
- address change,
- divorce,
- marriage,
- birth or adoption,
- reduction in work hours, or
- any other change that could affect benefit plan eligibility.

### ***Supplemental Benefits***

Blount County offers supplemental voluntary benefits employees may purchase. The voluntary coverage options include long term disability, short term disability, accident, term life, whole life, cancer, critical illness, vision as well as the State of TN 457(b), 401k, and Roth 401K plans. These additional benefit options can be administered through payroll deduction. Information on these products is provided at orientation and during the annual open enrollment period. For more information on these products contact Human Resources.

### ***Workers' Compensation***

If an employee experiences an on-the-job injury or illness, the employee is required to:

- Report the incident to the supervisor immediately.

- Ensure that the supervisor completes the First Report of Injury form provided by the State of Tennessee.
- Select a physician by completing the Employee's Choice of Physician form provided by the County.
- If an employee requires emergency medical treatment, the employee should go to the nearest emergency room of their choice. If the situation warrants, contact the local ambulance service for transport. Notification to Risk Management should be made as soon as possible. If a follow up appointment is required after the initial visit to the emergency room, the injured worker must choose a physician from the Employee's Choice of Physicians form. The injured worker is not authorized to return to the emergency room for follow up treatment (i.e., removal of stitches, change of injury dressing, etc.).

If the claim is deemed compensable, Risk Management or the County's third-party administrator will schedule the initial appointment with the medical provider selected. Employees or supervisors are not authorized to schedule the initial appointment with a medical provider for Workers' Compensation injuries.

The injured worker is required to attend all scheduled appointments with the authorized treating physician and/or approved physical therapist. If an appointment must be rescheduled, notify Risk Management and they will reschedule the appointment.

It is the injured workers' responsibility to notify their supervisor and Risk Management if the authorized treating physician instructs the employee not to return to work, or to return to work with restrictions by providing the forms from the physician. It is also the injured workers' responsibility to notify their supervisor and Risk Management when the physician releases the injured worker to full duty by providing the forms from the authorized treating physician.

If the restrictions assigned by the authorized treating physician cannot be met within the department, Risk Management may offer the injured worker Alternate Duty. Alternate Duty is a temporary job assignment that will accommodate the injured workers' restrictions assigned by the authorized treating physician. Modified duty will be offered to the injured worker upon availability. The alternative job duties will be productive and valued work that can be performed safely and without risk of re-injury or aggravation to the disability, or risk to other employees.

Copies of all paperwork, including return to work forms, must be turned in to your supervisor and Risk Management.

If you are released to return to work with restrictions from your physician, and Blount County can provide you with a job that meets those restrictions, you are required to return to work and complete the assigned tasks.

### ***Life insurance***

Blount County provides Life Insurance to employees who work at least 30 hours per week on a regular basis. The County provides (1) one times the employee's salary, up to a maximum benefit of \$50,000; the coverage is two (2) times the amount for accidental death.



The plan document is available in the Human Resources Office or on the HR web site at <https://www.blounttn.org/761/Blount-County-Government-Benefits>.

### ***Tennessee Consolidated Retirement Systems (TCRS)***

<b>Membership:</b>	Employed six months (full-time) to be a member
<b>Contribution Requirement:</b>	Five percent of salary
<b>Vesting:</b>	Vesting rights after 5 years of service <i>(A vested member is one who has accrued enough years of service to guarantee a retirement benefit once age requirements are met)</i>
<b>Refunds:</b>	Upon separation of employment, participants may apply for a refund of account balance.  Federal withholding tax requirements apply to early withdrawals.
<b>Income Benefit Eligibility:</b>	Age 60 or 30 full years of service for unreduced income benefits. Age 55 for reduced income benefits.
<b>Income Benefit Eligibility (Sheriff's Office-Post Certified and Corrections Personnel):</b>	Age 55 with 25 years of creditable service.
<b>Average Final Compensation:</b>	The average of the five highest consecutive years of salary, which cannot exceed 75% of average final compensation.

Employees planning to retire *must* apply online with TCRS ninety (90) days prior to the planned retirement date. Contact the Human Resources Department for additional information or assistance.

### ***Benefits Eligibility Upon Retirement***

Employees retiring from Blount County Government at any age with 30 years' service or at age 60 with at least ten (10) years' consecutive service with Blount County Government may elect to continue coverage under the County's medical, dental and vision plans. Employees considering retirement must contact the Human Resources Department at least three (3) months prior to the potential retirement date to verify benefit eligibility.

### ***Tuition Reimbursement***

Tuition reimbursement is a plan which offers financial assistance to an employee taking college-level courses directly related to his/her work or to a position the employee might conceivably be considered for in the future and which is likely to increase his/her value to the County. This program is not specifically intended to support a full-time course of study but is designed to enhance the quality of work that the individual brings to the job. It is provided to those employees

classified as regular full-time who have satisfactorily completed one year of continuous service. To receive reimbursement under this policy, an employee must agree to continue in employment with Blount County for **at least two (2) years** from the date of completion of the course(s) being reimbursed and to return the reimbursement if the employee does not continue employment for at least one year. Tuition Reimbursement is available when the following requirements have been met:

A. Courses are job-relevant, college-level courses taken at an institution that is accredited (as recognized by the US Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education), found at <http://www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation/search.asp>, and must be on a for-grade basis and printed out and attached to the approval form. Courses taken on a pass/fail or audit basis that are job-relevant or are required for a degree program that is job relevant, may be eligible for tuition reimbursement; however, such courses must be presented to his/her immediate supervisor and then to the Department Head/Elected Official of the employee for consideration and approval. It is the responsibility of the employee making the request to make it clear on his/her pre-approval form that the course is pass/fail or is on an audit basis.

B. The employee has submitted a Tuition Reimbursement Form for pre-approval to his/her immediate supervisor. The Department Head/Elected Official will review the pre-approved form to determine whether or not the course is eligible for reimbursement. Tuition Reimbursement Forms are available on the Blount County web site/Human Resources Department. Failure to obtain pre-approval from his/her immediate supervisor may result in denial of the tuition reimbursement request.

C. Upon completion of the course, the employee must submit proof that he/she has received a grade of C or better if a course was taken on a for-grade basis, or the employee must submit written proof from the instructor and/or sponsor that the employee satisfactorily completed a course on a pass/fail and/or audit basis. Proof must be submitted by official transcript, delivered unopened by the employee or sent directly from the school. The employee must also submit the itemized tuition receipt verifying cost and payment of tuition. This receipt must show a listing of all costs by item (e.g., maintenance/tuition, activity fee, etc.) must show the dates the fees were assessed and paid, must show payment amount(s) and method of payment (e.g., check, credit card, financial aid, etc.), and must indicate a zero balance on the account. Submission for completed course will be returned to the Department Head/Elected Official of the employee for review and forwarded to the Accounting Department for reimbursement. Copies of completed course work will be placed in the employee's training and/or personnel file.

D. The employee affirms that he/she has not been totally reimbursed for this approved educational training by some other funding source. Persons being supplemented under any other program(s) (e.g., state supplements, G.I. Bill, scholarships including the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship program, government funding, etc.) are only eligible for benefits under Blount County Government's reimbursement program for the difference between the cost of the approved training and any other funding source(s) up to the maximum reimbursement cap of \$1,800 per fiscal year, \$600 per semester or \$450 per

quarter.

- D. Employees will not be reimbursed for late fees, cost of books, service fees, technology fees, athletic fees. Employees will be reimbursed for maintenance/tuition fees upon submission of a transcript as follows:

<u>For Grade Basis</u>	<u>% Reimbursement</u>
A	100%
B	90%
C	80%
Below C	No Reimbursement
Pass/Fail or Audit	50% Undergraduate Coursework 100% Graduate Coursework

Employees intending to take courses must have forms to supervisors in January of each year. Approval forms must be completed prior to the start of each semester. Each approval must have the authorization of the Department Head/Elected Official to ensure funds are available for reimbursement. The Elected Official may suspend tuition reimbursement at any point due to lack of funding. Any violation of this policy or procedure will result in the employee refunding all tuition back to Blount County and will be considered a serious violation.

#### ***Professional Development Courses***

Courses designed for Professional Development must be pre-approved by the employee's immediate supervisor and the Department Head/Elected Official. Course documentation (certificate, transcript, etc.) must be provided upon completion of the course. Failure to satisfactorily complete a Professional Development course results in reimbursement of the full cost to Blount County Government. Employees also agree to remain with Blount County Government for a period of two (2) years from the date of course completion.

Blount County Government encourages employees to participate in programs such as Leadership Blount which have a positive impact upon the community. Employees wishing to enroll in such programs must have written approval from the immediate supervisor and Department Head/Elected Official. ***Budgetary limitations may affect the number of accepted applicants for which the tuition can be paid by Blount County Government.***