The SOCM Sentinel

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Building Power, Together: SOCM's 2026 Annual Meeting

There's something special about getting SOCM members from across the state together in one place. Old friends reconnect, new friendships form, stories and ideas are exchanged, and everyone leaves with a little more energy for the work ahead.

That was certainly the case at SOCM's 2026 Annual Meeting, held Saturday, October 3, at Montgomery Bell State Park. Nearly 80 members came together to celebrate another year of grassroots organizing, reflect on the challenges facing our communities, strengthen our organizing skills, and make plans for the future. The day was filled with thoughtful conversations, hands-on activities, plenty of laughter, and reminders of why SOCM has spent more than 50 years bringing Tennesseans together to create change.

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2026 Annual Meeting Attendees at Montgomery Bell State Park

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A MEMBER OF COMMUNITY SHARES

SOCM is a 54-year-old, member-driven organization dedicated to empowering Tennesseans in their efforts to have a greater voice in determining their own future. We accomplish this by training local leaders and by developing and sustaining long-term, democratically run, and locally rooted membership organizations in communities throughout Tennessee. SOCM members work towards a Tennessee where all people are treated with dignity, where our environment is preserved and protected, and where corporations and public officials are held accountable to the needs of the people.

You can reach us at 865-249-7488 or info@socm.org. The mailing address for the main office is P. O. Box 12667, Knoxville, TN 37912.

Our website – socm.org

LOCAL ROOTS . . . STATEWIDE IMPACT!

SOCMoCo Update

By Rosa Ponce, SOCMoCo Chapter Rep

The Montgomery County chapter (SOCMoCo) hosted a back-to-school event that turned out many in a targeted neighborhood. We had many come together in support of children and had a chance to share the SOCM mission with a new audience.

The youth of our chapter have been staying busy, one of the youth, Ashanti Gray, made a call to action at the TN4All grocery tax forum, asking all to get out and vote! She also spoke to the school board meeting about issues that her and other youth face.

SOCMoCo is also stepping up their efforts to advocate for oversight and accountability from the Montgomery County Sheriff and the Courts. SOCMoCo members toured the jail in the aftermath of the death of Darius Chappell to see for themselves the conditions inside. In addition, they are establishing a court watch to monitor the activities of the Montgomery County courts and learn about judicial procedures.

Finally, many of our members got to spend time together at the annual meeting. We are excited to follow the lead of the youth in our chapter!



SOCMoCo members at monthly court watch. Pictured are (from left to right) Monica Meeks, Debra Dixon, Rosa Ponce, and Adrian Dailey.

Sumner County Recap

By Lindsay Doss

Public School Strong Sumner has been busy in the community over the last few months. We hosted our second annual Stuff the Bus school supply giveaway. We had face painting, arts and crafts, music, and most importantly: school supplies going into the hands of students and their families. We are incredibly grateful to everyone who made this event possible - the donors, the community organizations who showed up to the event, and our Public School Strong members. We will continue our community outreach by following up with folks who completed our Gallatin community survey. We look forward to the conversations and the work of ensuring our public schools serve all students.



Pictured at right is a group of Sumner County members canvassing for Public School Strong. From left to right are Jenda Clemmons, Iris Saunders, Theeda Murphy, and Jean Myers (with the hat taking our selfie).

LOCAL ROOTS . . . STATEWIDE IMPACT!

KCEC Chapter Update

Building Community for Strong Public Schools in Knox County

Knox County faced a critical local election this year, with five of the nine Board of Education seats on the August 6 County General and State & Federal Primary Election ballot. Members of the Knox County Education Coalition (KCEC) Chapter of SOCM combined doorknocking about the "South Knox Solution," Knox County Schools (KCS') planned rezoning on the horizon, with voter education about the importance of their school board seat on the August 6th ballot. We armed ourselves with our survey and information about a local candidate forum in July organized by the South Knoxville Neighborhood & Business Coalition (SKNBC) and partners, and utilized an informational flyer from the local Voter Turnout Coalition about how and when to vote in the August election. About the forum, Dave Gorman, longtime South Knoxville resident and teacher, shared, "This might've been my favorite event, because **it demonstrated our ability as an organization to work with other organizations and build some collaborative and useful structure in the community**."

Caroline Mann, parent of 3 grown KCS graduates, had this reflection: **"Talking to our neighbors in person lets us get straight to the real challenges in the fight for public education (not the manufactured culture war topics), and to share news about state and local political decisions that they might not have known about yet.** When you talk to somebody on their doorstep about their experiences with Knox County Schools and then see them get more engaged at a community gathering, it's really exciting to know that these personal connections are helping to build a movement for strong public schools." Sam Graff, who signed up with us at a No Kings action in April, shared she was nervous at first about doorknocking in South Knox where she lives, but after trying it, realized, "we are simply speaking to our neighbors, just as anyone might. I came away feeling more connected to my community, and like I had made a difference." KCEC Chapter Chair, South Knoxville resident, and West High School teacher David Krebs shared, **"I think about how I've been walking over a bunch of yards to knock on these neighbors' doors and it is great. It feels like we are finally getting ahead instead of being caught in a state of reacting."**

Members mobilized for the July County Commission meeting to respond to Commission's unprecedented move to cut the school budget by $4M in June, followed days later by an additional $3.8M less funding than anticipated from the State. Michael O'Malley, parent and Carter High School teacher who spoke up, recalls, "The State and County put KCS in an impossibly unfair position; ***the fact that the Commission in particular felt free to do this with impunity indicates that there is a deep disconnect between the priorities of the County Commission and the school district.*** The situation revealed that there is a lot of work to do in making sure that the County Commission understands what needs to be done to fully fund a school district, and **we as the public need to loudly hold the County accountable for its decisions regarding school funding**, especially now that there are new Commissioners and a new County Mayor."

On July 18, we participated in the League of Women Voters of Knoxville-Knox County's first major all-ballot candidate event "Voterpalooza," held at Dr. Walter Hardy Park in East Knoxville near an early voting location, speaking with participants and distributing responses to our Board of Education Candidate Questionnaire from 7 of the 10 candidates. **This became our first Public School Strong Knox County School Board 2026 Voter Guide**, released at our August 1st Public School Strong Celebration and Back-to-School Bash at Lakeshore Park. Minda Papson Begley, KCEC SOCM member and mother of twin young boys, helped lead the August 1st event, inviting friends, neighbors, and local businesses owners. **"It was a spirited celebration that honored public schools as the foundation and lifeblood of a community."** Maddie Casey, SOCM Board Rep for the

Upcoming Board Meetings

Tuesday, October 27

Tuesday, November 17

KCEC Chapter, shared, "I enjoyed seeing kids have a good time while parents learned about how to be involved with our organizing efforts. **People braved the rain to come and be in community with us which felt extra special**." Laura Bean-Allen, English Language Learner/ ELL teacher at Fulton High School, mother, and Public School Strong pledger, helped plan the event and said, "**It made me feel like I'm not the only one out here who wants to see our public schools be supported.** A few days later, we saw a change in our school board on Election Day that will hopefully lead to tangible, increased investment in our public schools—it felt like it all paid off!" On August 6, Knox County voters added a pro-public education member from South Knox to the Board of Education, active parent Brandy Jenkins. Our Chapter took a moment to celebrate, recalling how Brandy became more active during our fight against the unfair third grade retention legislation that affected her daughter.

After creating a summary of our survey data in early September, Cody Pritchard, former teacher and administrator and now PhD student in Education, shared, "Doorknocking in South Knox has clarified a few things for me," he said. "While no community is monolithic, **so many of our neighbors share common concerns**: that funding vouchers should never come at the expense of public schools; that we need to be more intentional about when, how, and whether students use technology; that teachers deserve the tools, resources, and time they need to do their jobs well (including reducing class sizes); and that communities deserve a meaningful voice in decisions about how their schools are zoned and rezoned."

On Sunday, September 20, roughly 20 community members gathered at Sam Duff Memorial Park to hear more about the projected expansion planning/ public school rezoning and the top themes from our doorknocking. Current and retired teachers and graduates, parents, students, concerned community members, business owners, and two elected officials - Brandy Jenkins, Board of Education Member for District 9 (South Knox County) and Karyn Adams, District 1/South Knoxville City Councilmember, thought together about current school/classroom capacity and teacher-student ratios, how our schools are funded, and about upcoming school and neighborhood group meetings and events. Dave Gorman shared, **"It gave me hope…It was a good reminder that people everywhere want good schools in their communities."**



Pictured above: Participants from the 9-20-26 South Knox Community Gathering on Public School Strong and Rezoning in District 9, including newly elected school board member Brandy Jenkins, pictured center.

LOCAL ROOTS . . . STATEWIDE IMPACT!

McMinn County Chapter Gets a Major Win!

By Marisa Payne, McMinn County Chapter member

I really enjoyed getting out into the community and speaking face-to-face with residents. It felt great to simply listen to what people genuinely wanted for their neighborhood. While specific suggestions varied—ranging from a community pool to a playground—nearly everyone agreed they wanted a space where families could get together.

Through extensive door-knocking, hosting community gatherings, and attending city council sessions, we built strong relationships across the neighborhood. It got to the point where residents would open their doors and recognize my SOCM shirt right away. Residents really appreciated how thorough our outreach was and our commitment to keeping them informed with follow-up communications.

While door-knocking, I met quite a few people who were unable to attend council meetings in person. Even so, we consistently brought a strong, passionate turnout to city council. The people who showed up to city council meetings were a mix of North City residents, former students of the old school, other McMinn County SOCM members, as well as friends and family who wanted to show their support. Early in the process, we recognized how important it was to collaborate with the city council to officially designate the vacant lot as a public park. With each meeting, I felt more confident that SOCM was making a difference for this community. I could see that what we were doing truly mattered, and it was rewarding to show our support for a community that has historically been overlooked.

After months of council meetings and door-knocking, we finally got the result we worked so hard for! At their August meeting, the city council officially designated the property as a public park and included it in their 2027 Parks Master Plan process! Being part of such a dedicated team that consistently showed up was an incredible feeling. In October, the city used the data from our 240 surveys as part of their parks master planning process. At their planning input session, North City was listed as the number one priority for the new year! Now that the land has officially been designated as a public park, I am excited to continue working alongside SOCM and the community to bring our vision to life.



Group Photo from August City Council Meeting.



McMinn Chapter members Missy and Cherryl speak at Athens City Council Meeting.



McMinn Chapter members attend Athens City Council Meeting.



Libby and Cynthia at the SOCM survey table during the Parkstown Cookout and Call to Action.



Grilling burgers at Parkstown Cookout and Call to Action.



Precious and Atazia lead a community story circle at Parkstown Cookout and Call to Action.



Residents gather at Parkstown Cookout and Call to Action.

Parkstown's First Public Action Event Was a Resounding Success

By Precious Brown and Atazia Jones, McMinn County Chapter Members

After a few months of door knocking and several well-attended resident team meetings, neighbors in Etowah's Parkstown neighborhood joined together for a lovely cookout and celebration on September 19th! The day was a powerful celebration of community, music and the remembrance of our roots. We had over 50 people show up and support the campaign to move the county to reinvest in the park. The goal of the cookout was to share more about our campaign issue, which is updating the dilapidated Parkstown park and bringing acknowledgement of our community history to the area.

Community members young and old had the chance to share their stories and fill out surveys about the park. During our story circle where we heard powerful stories of growing up in Etowah's historic black community. The next step of Parkstown's campaign will be holding a community meeting to prepare a more detailed proposal to McMinn's county commissioners and continue growing in our number of supporters. Currently, emerging themes include the need for lighting, seating in the pavilion, cleaning up the tennis courts which have been overtaken by brush, and updating playground equipment.

SOCM IN THE LENS



KCEC members attend South Knoxville Neighborhood & Business Coalition (SKNBC) local candidate forum on July 16, 2026.



Lance McCold and Laura Bean-Allen at August 1, 2026 Public School Strong Celebration and Back to School Bash.



Above photo is from the September 20, 2026 South Knox Community Gathering. Photo below was taken July 18, 2026 at Voterpalooza.



Cadence Collins and Minda Papson Begley at the August 1, 2026 Public School Strong Celebration and Back to School Bash.





Chauncey O'Dell and Jon Jonakin at the Annual Meeting



Pictured at left, below, and right are RuCo chapter members tabling at MTSU's Meet Murfreesboro event.







Pictured above left and below left, Sumner County PSS passed out school supplies and engaged with the community at the Second Annual Stuff the Bus Event.



SOCMoCo members supporting youth member Ashanti (center) in her call to action: get out and vote!





Sumner County PSS participated in the Affirm Sumner festival. People were invited to exercise their creativity and create a small self-portrait on the community mural.

FUNDRAISING CORNER

Small Gifts, Big Change: Powering SOCM's Mission

SOCM is powered by people who believe in our mission. A mission where all people are treated with dignity, where our environment is preserved and protected, and where corporations and public officials are held accountable to the needs of the people.

When you give to SOCM, you are working with neighbors and friends who are working towards the same mission and goals. We can turn that gift into meaningful support and lasting change.

As the end of the year starts getting closer, many people think about end of year gifts to the organizations that mean the most to them.

Your generosity ensures that the work can continue and reach more people. Grassroots fundraising is all of us together, pitching in to build power and funding for a cause.

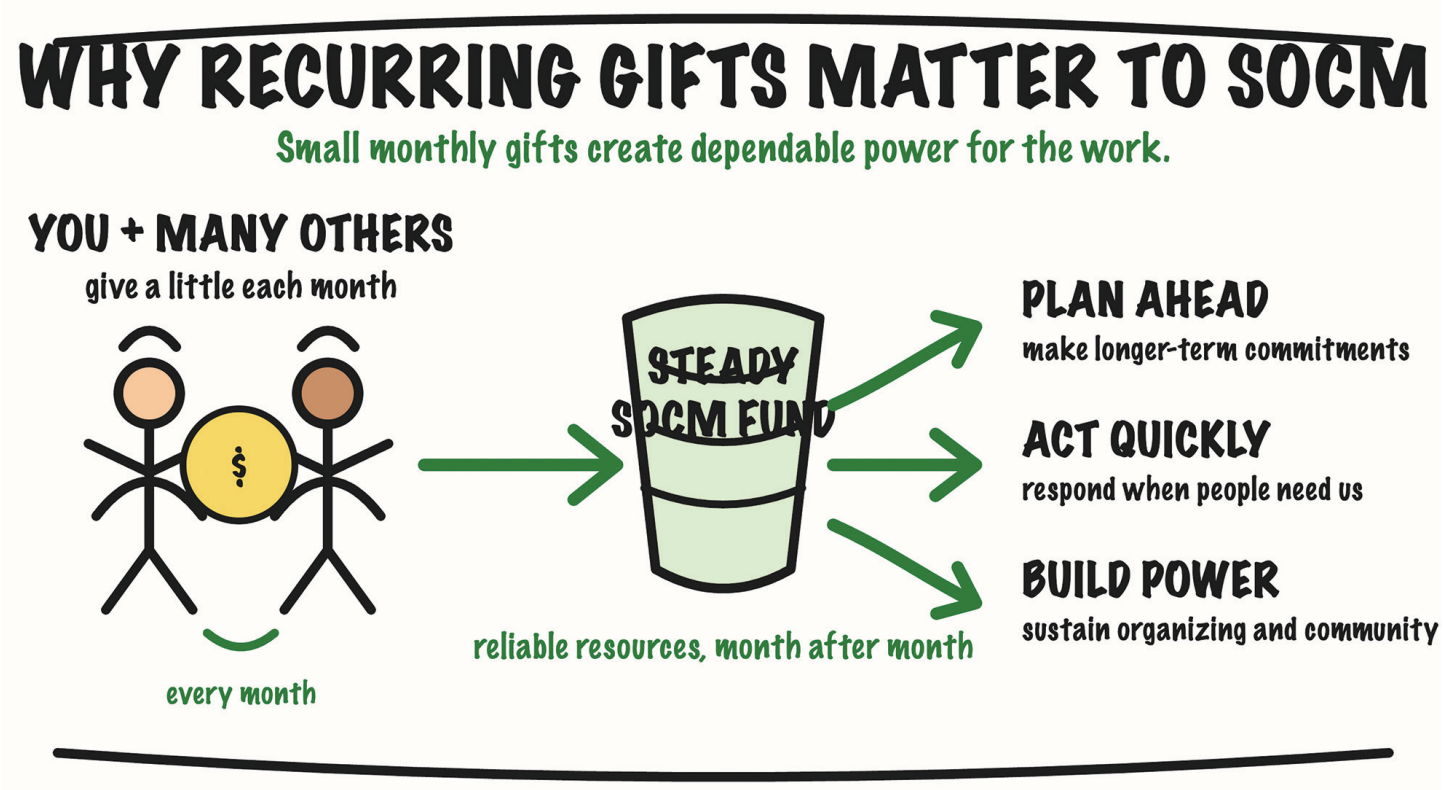
You may think that you don't possess a worthy gift, but that just isn't the case. You decide on a meaningful gift from you and that turns into a beautiful gift to SOCM.

Please consider a monthly gift to SOCM. Even $5.00 a month assists us in planning ahead and having reliable resources at our fingertips.

Scan the QR code to start your monthly gift today. Thank you for making a difference in your community!



From left to right, Geneva Clifton, Angela Wynn, Shannon Whitfield, Candida Layne, Sara Denny, and Gayla Hall talk about fundraising at Annual Meeting.



ANNUAL MEETING

Building Power, Together . . . *Continued from Page 1*

SOME Member Quotes

"Witnessing the youngest member in attendance, 8-year-old J'Lianna, standing up boldly, introducing herself, and insisting that she have a meaningful role in our group. She was our time keeper and energizer bunny."

"No boring meetings! Lots of fun activities!"

"I enjoyed collaborating with people who want to take care of their communities."

Celebrating Our Work and Understanding the Challenges Ahead

The morning kicked off with opportunities for members to reconnect and get to know one another, followed by a lively game of SOCM Jeopardy! that brought some friendly competition to the gathering.

But the day was about much more than fun and games. Members spent time celebrating the work happening in SOCM chapters and communities across Tennessee, recognizing the dedication and persistence it takes to organize around the issues that matter most to our families and neighbors.

The conversations also turned to the challenges ahead. With Tennessee's political landscape continuing to shape what is possible at the local and state levels, members discussed the issues affecting their communities and what it will take to build the collective power needed to address them.

These discussions reinforced something SOCM members know well: meaningful change doesn't happen over-



Pictured at left and above SOCM members take part in mingle and workshop activities at the 2026 Annual Meeting.

ANNUAL MEETING

Building Power, Together . . . *Continued from Page 11*

night, and it rarely happens because one person acts alone. It takes neighbors coming together, identifying shared concerns, building relationships, and working toward solutions.

Building Our Base, Building Our Power
One of the central themes of this year's meeting was "Building Our Base", a reminder that strong grassroots organizations depend on the people who make them work.

How do we connect with people who care about the same issues but haven't yet become involved? How do we build relationships that last beyond a single meeting or campaign? And how do we create opportunities for more people to take on leadership roles in their communities?

These are questions that have always been important to SOCM, but they are especially relevant as we look toward the coming year.

Members shared experiences from their own communities, considered what has worked and what hasn't, and discussed how to strengthen local organizing efforts. The conversations emphasized that building a base isn't simply about increasing membership numbers. It's about developing relationships, growing leadership, and creating an organization where people feel connected to one another and empowered to act.



Small group discussion at the Annual Meeting.

Putting Organizing Skills Into Practice
The afternoon shifted from reflection to action, giving members an opportunity to practice some of the skills that turn community concerns into effective organizing campaigns.

Through a hands-on scenario workshop, participants explored what goes into planning and carrying out collective action. The activity encouraged members to think strategically about how to bring people together, communicate their goals, and use collective power to make their voices heard.

For longtime members, it was an opportunity to draw on years of organizing experience. For newer members, it offered a chance to build confidence and learn alongside people who have been doing this work in communities across Tennessee.

The afternoon also included conversations about fundraising and membership, two essential parts of sustaining a strong, independent, member-led organization.

SOCM's strength has always come from its members. Growing that membership, developing new leaders, and building the resources needed to support local campaigns will be critical as we move into 2027.



SOCMoCo was in the house at the Annual Meeting!



RuCo members had great turnout for the Annual Meeting!

Taking Care of SOCM Business
The Annual Meeting also provided an opportunity for members to participate in the decisions that guide the organization.

During the lunch hour, members came together for SOCM business, including consideration of proposed changes to the organization's bylaws, which passed by a two-thirds majority vote of the members present.

Member participation in these decisions is an important part of what makes SOCM a grassroots, democratically governed organization. Members don't simply support SOCM's work. They help determine its direction and shape its future.

Making Time for Fun and Friendship
Of course, a SOCM gathering wouldn't be complete without a little fun.

Per tradition, members gathered for a group photo and a spirited game of tug-of-war. The friendly competition provided plenty of laughter and an opportunity to enjoy being together outside the meeting room.

And the connections didn't end when the afternoon sessions wrapped up. Members had the opportunity to continue conversations over dinner and enjoy an evening of karaoke.

These moments of fellowship are more than just a welcome break from the serious work of organizing. They're part of what makes SOCM a community.

Looking Ahead to 2027
As the meeting came to a close, members turned their attention to the year ahead and the opportunities to build on the work already underway.

The challenges facing Tennessee communities are real, and the work of organizing is never finished. But the Annual Meeting offered an encouraging reminder of the experience, creativity, determination, and commitment SOCM members bring to that work every day.

Whether members are organizing around a local issue, developing new leaders, strengthening their chapters, or working together to influence decisions at the state level, each effort contributes to a stronger statewide movement.

And while the issues may differ from one community to another, the foundation remains the same: people coming together to make their communities better places to live.

Thank you to everyone who attended, helped plan, facilitated activities, shared ideas, and made the 2026 Annual Meeting such a meaningful gathering.
We left Montgomery Bell State Park with renewed energy, stronger connections, and plenty of ideas for what comes next.



Rosa Ponce and Sara Denny led the closing ceremony with the past and future lighting the present.

ANNUAL MEETING











Pictured on this page are some SOCM Annual Meeting participants divided into "lifeboats" with the people who had common answers to questions during our welcome session, which then became "SOCM Jeopardy" teams during a trivia game about SOCM's wins, history, issues, and structure, and the shifting political landscape in TN over time. These later grew into the community teams in the scenario for "Expanding our public action imaginations" section, where members engaged in brainstorming what kind of public action they could imagine to best address the given community problem and opportunity scenario that the staff and member team had come up with.

CIVIC EDUCATION CORNER

For anything election-related in Tennessee, go to GoVoteTN.gov

Your go-to resource for anything election-related in Tennessee is GoVoteTN.gov. You can use the app or view it in your browser or scan this QR code.

The informationbelow is taken largely from this site.

Key Dates for the 2026 Election Cycle:

Tuesday, November 3, 2026
State and Federal General Election:
We will vote for candidates for Governor, U.S. Senate, U.S. House, Tennessee Senate (odd-numbered districts), and Tennessee House, and in some locations, municipal elections are held with the November election.

Deadline	Date
Voter Registration	Monday, October 5, 2026
Early Voting	Wednesday, October 14 – Thursday, October 29, 2026
Absentee Ballot Request	Tuesday, October 27, 2026

Why do we vote?
The people you elect in shape your daily life. Our elected officials make key decisions about our communities every day. Every vote moves the needle.

Reminders:
Check your registration! Confirm you're registered to vote in the November 3 State and Federal General Election at GoVoteTN.gov (NOTE: The deadline to register or make changes to your registration was October 5).

Even if your status is 'Inactive' you can still vote! All you'll have to do is fill out an additional form at the polls to confirm your address. This is much easier to do at Early Voting vs. on Election Day.

For any questions, call your County Election Commission. Find their information here: https://tnsos.org/elections/election_commissions.php.

LAST DAY TO REQUEST AN ABSENTEE BALLOT IS SATURDAY, OCTOBER 24
If you have a disability, are a caretaker for someone who does or are planning to travel, you can vote by mail! The earlier you request the better. You must submit a written request containing the information below to your local county election commission office (see https://tnsos.org/elections/election_commissions.php) by the tenth day before Election Day. You can use the absentee ballot request form to make sure all required information is provided. See the complete guide on absentee by-mail ballots at https://sos.tn.gov/elections/guides/guide-to-absentee-voting.

When and where can I vote?
The easiest way for Tennessee voters to find when and where to vote, early voting and Election Day polling locations and hours, view and mark sample ballots, see their elected officials, districts and county election commission information, as well as access online election results is through the GoVoteTN app, or go to: https://web.go-vote-tn.elections.tn.gov/

WHAT ARE WE VOTING FOR? For a full sample ballot, visit GoVoteTN.gov

The State and Federal General election determines our Governor, Congress, State Senators from odd-numbered districts, and all State House members of the state legislature. Tennessee does not have formal party registration. You make your choice at the polls.

WHAT DO I NEED TO BRING TO VOTE?
All you ever need is your TN or Federal photo ID. Driver's licenses, carry permits, passports and military IDs are all accepted, even if expired.

Out of state IDs, student IDs and County work badges are not accepted. For voting purposes, you do not need a REAL ID star on your license.

Your voter registration card is not required in order to vote.

Continued on last page

For anything election-related . . . *Continued from Page 15*

You can bring a sample ballot either on paper or on a device! A digital sample ballot is available at GoVoteTN.Gov

HAVE AN ISSUE AT THE POLLS?
Call or text MYVOTE to 866-OUR-VOTE (866-687-8683). This nonpartisan Election Protection Hotline is staffed by voting experts and attorneys who can answer your questions and help resolve issues.

Language Support Available:
Spanish/English: 888-VE-Y-VOTA (888-839-8682)
Asian Languages/English: 888-API-VOTE (888-273-8683)
Arabic/English: 844-YALLA-US (844-925-5287)

Let's get ready: 115TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
The One Hundred Fifteenth General Assembly will convene at noon (CST) on Tuesday, January 12, 2027. Stay tuned at https://capitol.tn.gov/.

Stay up to date with the latest SOCM news by following us on social media!

@SOCMTN

@socmtn

@socmtube

@socm

Don't forget to check out our website, socm.org, for updates, SOCM Sentinels, past annual reports, links to media articles, videos, and other resources.





TUG-OF-WAR TRADITION CONTINUES AT ANNUAL MEETING. Pictured at left is the over 40 group and above is the under 40 group. Guess who won again—the over 40s! It was a battle to the end and so much fun to watch.

Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment

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