

Christopher Richards - Letter to Tennessee Comptroller

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May 03, 2025

Office of the Comptroller of the Treasury
State of Tennessee
Cordell Hull Building
425 5th Avenue North
Nashville, TN 37243

Subject: Request for Review and Assistance Regarding Procedural Irregularities and Contract Management in Williamson County Government

Dear Comptroller Mumpower,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding what I believe to be a pattern of serious procedural breakdowns and potentially improper administrative conduct within Williamson County government. These issues, which have impacted the legislative independence of the County Commission and may have led to the misuse of public funds, warrant your office's urgent attention.

Most recently, I sponsored Resolution 1-25-12, which was properly filed and appeared on the full Commission's agenda for January 13, 2025. The resolution was deferred by vote of the full Commission. Despite this, it was subsequently reintroduced in the Budget Committee without any formal referral, without public agenda placement, and without any notice to me as the sponsoring Commissioner. I only became aware of its reconsideration because I happened to attend the meeting—had I not been present, the matter could have been acted upon entirely outside my knowledge or participation.

This occurred despite the Mayor's Office having previously confirmed, via an internal communication on January 14, that no further committee review was necessary. When I raised this procedural failure with County legal counsel, I received a response narrowly

focused on parliamentary semantics—distinguishing “deferred” from “tabled” motions—while entirely ignoring the broader violation of Commission process and sponsor rights. Counsel justified the committee’s unilateral re-review by claiming the subject matter “fell within the committee’s cognizance,” a position that is circular and contrary to the principle that the full Commission retains jurisdiction over deferred matters unless it votes otherwise.

This would be troubling enough in isolation. However, it reflects a larger pattern of the County’s legal team being selectively used to obstruct the work of certain Commissioners, particularly when efforts conflict with the political interests of the Mayor’s Office. This same dynamic has played out in matters related to fiscal oversight and contract management.

In a separate incident last year, I requested a copy of the contract between the County and the Williamson County Chamber of Commerce, which administers our Economic Development Council. To my alarm, I discovered that the contract had expired nine months earlier, yet payments totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars had continued without any active agreement. When I raised the issue, the Mayor and legal counsel stated that the County’s budget approval alone justified the continued payments—even though that budget was tied to a contract that no longer existed. Worse still, when the Commission later approved a new contract for the upcoming fiscal year, legal counsel claimed that this new agreement could retroactively authorize payments made under the prior, expired contract. This is not only highly irregular but appears to be an after-the-fact legal justification designed to obscure prior administrative failures.

Additionally, legal counsel has endorsed and facilitated a troubling procedural arrangement through which the Mayor’s Office, legal department, and unelected department heads are allowed to initiate resolutions directly into the legislative process—without sponsorship from any elected Commissioner, and contrary to the intent of our Commission rules.

In practice, the process works as follows: the Mayor or a department head decides to pursue a resolution, which is then drafted by the legal department and submitted directly to one or more Commission committees. The Mayor’s Office—not the Commission Chair or an elected sponsor—determines which committee(s) will hear the resolution. At that point, legal counsel claims the resolution becomes valid because the committee members could, in theory, refuse to hear it. But in practice, committees nearly always agree to hear the resolution, and whether it passes or not, it is still forwarded to the full Commission for consideration.

Importantly, Commission rules require that all resolutions be signed before filing, and that rule is enforced. In these cases, because no Commissioner sponsors the resolution, legal counsel has the committee chair sign it after committee review, effectively assigning sponsorship retroactively—even if the chair had no role in drafting or supporting the measure. The resolution is then filed with the County Clerk and proceeds through the legislative process as if it originated from an elected official.

This issue is not hypothetical. A recent example involved a resolution to purchase a local radio station—an initiative that clearly originated from the Mayor’s Office. The resolution was submitted to committee and ultimately signed by the committee chair, who was designated as the sponsor. However, during the full Commission meeting, when I asked who had actually sponsored the resolution, the committee chair denied being its sponsor. Commissioner Paul Webb then claimed sponsorship on the floor—but subsequently voted against the resolution. This incident illustrates the confusion and lack of ownership caused by the current process. Resolutions are being attributed to individuals who neither initiated nor support them, which erodes legislative transparency and makes it nearly impossible for Commissioners or the public to determine who is truly accountable for proposed legislation.

This process stands in stark contrast to the procedure for resolutions brought forward by Commissioners. As a Commissioner, I must personally draft, sign, and file a resolution before it is eligible for committee review, and I alone determine which committees will hear it. In fact, when new Commissioners are first sworn in and trained, they are routinely instructed to submit their resolutions to the Mayor’s Office, rather than the County Clerk. This instruction alone reinforces the undue executive control over legislative process and further distorts the proper separation of powers. The administrative path described above bypasses these requirements entirely.

This arrangement not only undermines representative government, but also blurs the separation of powers, allowing the executive branch to insert legislation directly into the Commission’s process with no elected sponsor and no accountability, while Commissioners must follow strict procedural steps. It marginalizes duly elected members, distorts committee authority, and compromises the integrity of the legislative process.

Given the above, I respectfully request that your office:

1. Review the procedural handling of Resolution 1-25-12, including the reintroduction in committee without referral or notice;
2. Investigate the County’s contract management practices, including payments made on

expired agreements and the legal rationale used to justify them;

3. Assess whether the County's legal counsel is operating with appropriate independence and objectivity, or if it is being used to marginalize legitimate oversight efforts by elected Commissioners;

4. Evaluate the current process of executive-driven resolution initiation, particularly the practice of introducing legislation through committees without a sponsoring Commissioner;

5. Provide any recommendations or oversight support necessary to ensure that Williamson County is complying with state laws, sound fiscal practices, and proper governmental procedures.

I am committed to transparency and good governance, and I believe these concerns go to the very heart of public trust in local institutions. I would be happy to provide supporting documentation or speak further with your staff at your convenience.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Christopher Richards
Williamson County Commissioner