



OFFICE OF  
SMALL BUSINESS ADVOCATE  
ANNUAL REPORT

JULY 2017

**Justin P. Wilson**  
Comptroller of the Treasury

**Richard Wilson**  
Small Business Advocate

*The 2017 Office of Small Business Advocate Annual Report is prepared in accordance with Tennessee Code Annotated § 8-4-706. This report provides an overview of the office's activities during the past year.*

Dear Members of the 110th General Assembly,

Wow! What a great year we have had for small businesses in Tennessee! Our state was just named the top state for small business job growth by one of the nation's biggest payroll providers, Paychex. Also, Visa ranked six of Tennessee's cities in the top 50 metropolitan cities for job growth: Cleveland (#7), Nashville (#8), Morristown (#19), Knoxville (#28), Johnson City (#29) and Clarksville (#33).



Since small businesses are such a vital part of Tennessee's economy, small business owners need a resource in state government that can be a useful and efficient guide when issues or questions may arise. The Office of Small Business Advocate (OSBA) is here to assist small business owners navigating through state regulations and bureaucratic red tape. The OSBA is here to focus on the relationship between state government and the small business owners of Tennessee as well as provide information for those wishing to start a small business and those that currently own a small business.

The OSBA strives to be a central point of contact for small business owners in Tennessee.

Often, government feels like a bureaucratic wall that's impossible to penetrate. I have dealt firsthand with the frustrations this can cause for small business owners. The great thing about the OSBA, is that business owners only have to deal with one person – me – to help direct them to the right place and, if necessary, help resolve issues or conflicts between state departments and small businesses.

The OSBA has an official contact in each of the 30 state agencies that have regulatory authority over businesses here in Tennessee. The law requires each commissioner and agency head to appoint an employee, usually a director or assistant director, to serve as the OSBA's point of contact if an issue or question arises.

Small Business owners do not always have time to navigate their way through state government. The OSBA is here to be a resource that can allow them to concentrate on what is most important – running their business.

If I can be of assistance to your or your constituents, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Wilson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Richard Wilson  
Small Business Advocate

## **HISTORY OF THE OFFICE**

Public Chapter 1129 of the Public Acts of 2010 established the Office of Small Business Advocate (Tenn. Code Ann. § 8-4-701 et seq.). The Office of Small Business Advocate is housed in the Office of the Comptroller of the Treasury and serves as a point of contact for Tennessee's small business owners to state government. The mission of the Comptroller's Office is to make government work better. The Office of Small Business Advocate supports the mission by making government work better for Tennessee's small business owners.

## OFFICE GOALS

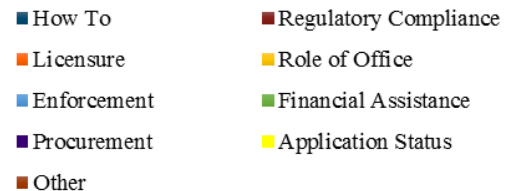
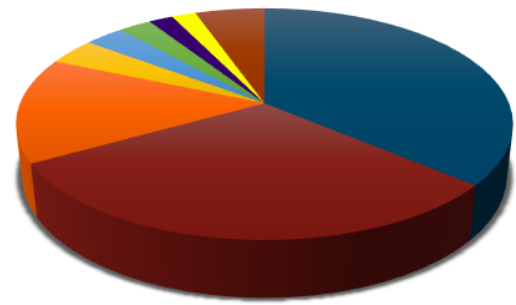
The objectives of the Office of Small Business Advocate are to:

- Answer questions and provide information to people who are starting a small business or who already own a small business in Tennessee.
- Informally mediate and assist with the resolution of issues concerning small business owners and state departments or agencies.
- Work with each state agency and department with regulatory authority over businesses to ensure that small business owners are provided with a means to communicate or comment on any enforcement activity conducted by agency or department personnel, including an audit, on-site inspection, compliance assistance effort, or other enforcement related communication or contact by agency or department personnel.
- Receive comments from small business owners regarding actions by agency or department employees conducting compliance or enforcement activities.
- Refer comments from small business owners to the contact person of the mentioned agency or department in the appropriate circumstances, and maintain the confidentiality of the identity of the person making such comments.

## INQUIRIES BY THE NUMBERS

- Since its creation, the Office of Small Business Advocate has assisted in resolving more than 2,000 inquiries.
- From July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017, the Office assisted small businesses with 433 inquiries.
- Over the past year, the Office referred small business inquiries to 11 state agencies.

## INQUIRIES BY CATEGORY



## RAISING AWARENESS



The Office of Small Business Advocate continually seeks opportunities to raise awareness for the office and the services it provides by participating in various media interviews, news articles, and speaking engagements. Not only during the legislative session, but throughout the year, the Small Business Advocate meets with community and civic organizations around the state.



Planning efforts are underway for the Office of Small Business Advocate to visit with the directors of each Small Business Development Center across the state. Tennessee's Small Business Development Centers are a part of the U.S. Small Business Administration. They offer one-on-one guidance for potential or existing small business owners. The goal of this tour is to foster collaboration and strengthen relationships that support small business owners.

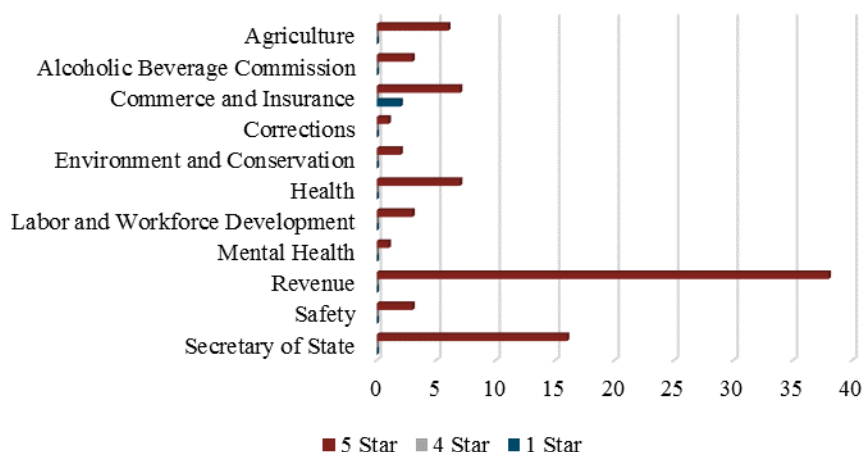


Additionally, the Office of Small Business Advocate and the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development's Business Enterprise Resource Office are coordinating a biannual meeting with the state agencies that have regulatory authority over small businesses. During this meeting, state departments and agencies will come together to help familiarize one another with how state departments and agencies impact Tennessee's small businesses and what can be done to offer better services to Tennessee's small business owners.

## AGENCY CONTACTS

As required by Tennessee Code Annotated § 8-4-703, the thirty (30) state departments and agencies that have regulatory authority over business are required to provide the Office of Small Business Advocate with a contact person. These contacts assist in the resolution of issues between small business owners and their department or agency. A complete list of agency contacts is available on our website at [www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA/ContactList.asp](http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA/ContactList.asp).

### INQUIRIES BY AGENCY OR DEPARTMENT



### AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS

Tennessee Code Annotated § 8-4-705 requires the Office of Small Business Advocate to evaluate and report annually to the General Assembly on state government's responsiveness to small business owners' concerns. On January 1, 2013, a rating system for timeliness of agencies' responses was implemented. For more information about this year's ratings of state agencies and departments, please see the chart to the left.

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### *What does the Office of Small Business Advocate do?*

The Office of Small Business Advocate is housed within the Office of the Comptroller of the Treasury and was established to make state government more responsive to Tennessee's small business owners. When a Tennessee small business owner has questions about what department or agency they need to speak with in state government, or if they are experiencing difficulties with a state department or agency, they can contact the Office of Small Business Advocate.

#### *When should a small business owner contact the Office of Small Business Advocate?*

If a small business owner does not know who to see or what procedure to use, they can contact the Office of Small Business Advocate. Additionally, if a small business owner has attempted to resolve an issue with a department or agency and they are unable to reach a solution, or if a small business owner is having difficulties navigating state government, they can contact the Small Business Advocate.

#### *Who does the Office of Small Business Advocate contact within a department or agency to resolve an issue?*

Tennessee law requires leaders of departments or agencies with regulatory authority over small businesses to appoint an employee to serve as the Office of Small Business Advocate's point of contact. A complete list of points of contact for these state departments and agencies can be found at [www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA/ContactList.asp](http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA/ContactList.asp).

### CONTACT INFORMATION

**Richard Wilson**  
*Small Business Advocate*

Office of Small Business Advocate  
James K. Polk State Office Building  
505 Deaderick Street, Suite 1700  
Nashville, TN 37243-1402

Office: (615) 401-7806  
Toll-free Phone: 1-866-831-3750  
E-mail: [smallbusiness.advocate@cot.tn.gov](mailto:smallbusiness.advocate@cot.tn.gov)

For more information, visit:  
[www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA](http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA)

