

## Opinion poll: Tennessee small businesses support expanding occupational licensing for justice-impacted individuals

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Download full report from our website: <https://smallbusinessmajority.org/our-research/workforce/tennessee-small-businesses-support-expanding-occupational-licensing-justice-impacted-individuals>

### Methodology

This poll reflects a survey of 100 small business owners and decision-makers in Tennessee. The poll was an online and phone survey conducted by Chesapeake Beach Consulting between February 5-11, 2024. The margin of error is +/-10% at a 95% confidence level.

### Survey Toplines

**1. Just to confirm, are you the owner of a for-profit business?**

Yes ..... 100%

**2. Please indicate your gender.**

Male..... 39%

Female..... 60%

Gender nonconforming and/or nonbinary ..... 1%

**3. How many people does your company employ including yourself? Please include full-time and part-time employees, but do not include independent contractors.**

2 to 10..... 57%

11 to 25 ..... 23%

26 to 50 ..... 9%

51 to 75 ..... 8%

75 to 100..... 3%

**4. What is the zip code of your business?**

Tennessee ..... 100%

**5. Which of the following categories best describes your business?**

Agriculture & Mining ..... 5%

Consulting & Business Services..... 7%

Education & Youth Services ..... 3%

Energy & Utilities ..... 0%

Engineering ..... 2%

Food & Beverage ..... 6%

Health, Beauty, Fitness ..... 5%

Healthcare, Pharmaceuticals & Biotech ..... 2%

Insurance & Financial Services .....	2%
Manufacturing.....	4%
Media & Entertainment .....	4%
Non-profit .....	0%
Real Estate & Construction .....	14%
Retail .....	10%
Service and Consumer Services.....	10%
Software & Internet.....	1%
Technology, Computers & Electronics .....	1%
Telecommunications .....	1%
Transportation & Storage.....	6%
Travel, Recreation & Leisure.....	0%
Wholesale & Distributors .....	6%
Other .....	11%

**6. How optimistic or pessimistic are you about your business prospects over the next 6 months?**

Very optimistic.....	47%
Somewhat optimistic.....	32%
Neither optimistic or pessimistic .....	7%
Somewhat pessimistic.....	8%
Very pessimistic .....	1%
Don't know .....	4%
Refused.....	1%
<b>TOTAL OPTIMISTIC .....</b>	<b>79%</b>
<b>TOTAL PESSIMISTIC .....</b>	<b>9%</b>

**7. Rank the overall state of your business, where 1 indicates that your business is performing very poorly and 5 indicates it is performing very well.**

One (Very Poorly).....	1%
Two.....	3%
Three .....	39%
Four.....	39%
Five (Very Well) .....	18%
TOTAL POORLY (one & two).....	4%
NEITHER POORLY OR WELL (three) .....	39%
TOTAL WELL (four & five).....	57%

**8. Thinking ahead to the next six months, how likely is it that your business will add employees? Would you say it is very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or very unlikely?**

Very likely.....	27%
Somewhat likely .....	30%
Somewhat unlikely .....	13%

Very unlikely .....	20%
Not applicable to my business.....	1%
Not sure.....	9%
Refused.....	0%
TOTAL LIKELY .....	57%
TOTAL UNLIKELY .....	33%

**9. What are some challenges that you faced/are facing when hiring new employees? (Select all that apply)**

People expect higher pay.....	33%
Hard to find quality candidates.....	57%
No challenges .....	16%
Currently not hiring .....	24%
Other .....	4%
None of the above.....	3%

**10. Which of the following actions have you performed to attract more workers? (Select all that apply)**

Increased pay .....	36%
Increased benefits .....	21%
Created more part-time positions .....	21%
Hired younger staff than usual.....	20%
Hired from within my local community.....	32%
Currently not hiring .....	25%
Other .....	4%
None of the above.....	4%

Thirty-three (33) states and the District of Columbia suspend or revoke driver’s licenses for unpaid traffic or court-related fines and fees. Many states also suspend licenses for failures to appear in court for traffic issues and other fine-only offenses.

Below are statements about driver’s license suspensions for unpaid fines or fees (this does not include failure to pay child support), or failure to appear for fine-only offenses. For each, indicate whether you agree or disagree.

**11. Driver’s license suspensions for unpaid fines and fees negatively impact employers’ ability to hire employees that can reliably attend work.**

Strongly agree .....	54%
Somewhat agree .....	25%
Somewhat disagree .....	11%
Strongly disagree.....	8%
Don’t know .....	2%
Refused.....	0%
TOTAL AGREE .....	79%
TOTAL DISAGREE .....	19%

**12. Access to transportation is vital for our nation’s workforce.**

Strongly agree .....	75%
Somewhat agree .....	18%
Somewhat disagree .....	1%
Strongly disagree.....	2%
Don’t know .....	4%
Refused.....	0%
TOTAL AGREE .....	93%
TOTAL DISAGREE .....	3%

**13. Driver’s license suspensions for unpaid fines and fees unfairly discriminate against low-income individuals.**

Strongly agree .....	43%
Somewhat agree .....	29%
Somewhat disagree .....	11%
Strongly disagree.....	13%
Don’t know .....	4%
Refused.....	0%
TOTAL AGREE .....	72%
TOTAL DISAGREE .....	24%

For each of the following, please tell me if you support or oppose.

**14. Proposals to end debt-based driver's license suspensions for unpaid court fines and fees.**

Strongly support.....	48%
Somewhat support .....	29%
Somewhat oppose .....	8%
Strongly oppose.....	9%
Don’t know .....	6%
Refused.....	0%
TOTAL SUPPORT .....	77%
TOTAL OPPOSE .....	17%

**15. Proposals to end debt-based driver's license suspensions for failing to appear in court for minor offenses and traffic violations.**

Strongly support.....	47%
Somewhat support .....	20%
Somewhat oppose .....	17%
Strongly oppose.....	9%
Don’t know .....	7%
Refused.....	0%
TOTAL SUPPORT .....	67%
TOTAL OPPOSE .....	26%

**16. Retroactively reinstating driver’s licenses for individuals who have had their license revoked for failing to pay a court fine or appear in court.**

Strongly support.....	44%
Somewhat support .....	35%
Somewhat oppose .....	9%
Strongly oppose.....	7%
Don’t know .....	5%
Refused.....	0%
TOTAL SUPPORT .....	79%
TOTAL OPPOSE .....	16%

**17. Automatically reinstating driver’s licenses for individuals who have had their license revoked for failing to pay a court fine or appear in court, without them having to reapply for the license at the state department of motor vehicles or pay a fee.**

Strongly support.....	47%
Somewhat support .....	32%
Somewhat oppose .....	8%
Strongly oppose.....	8%
Don’t know .....	5%
Refused.....	0%
TOTAL SUPPORT .....	79%
TOTAL OPPOSE .....	16%

**18. Requiring the state to notify individuals who have had their license revoked for failing to pay a court fine or appear in court that their license is being reinstated automatically?**

Strongly support.....	60%
Somewhat support .....	26%
Somewhat oppose .....	10%
Strongly oppose.....	2%
Don’t know .....	1%
Refused.....	1%
TOTAL SUPPORT .....	86%
TOTAL OPPOSE .....	12%

Thinking now about another topic...

Nearly one in four professions require an occupational or professional license, including plumbing, dentistry, nursing, cosmetology, law, and many others. Today, individuals in 30 states can be denied a license because of a previous criminal record.

**19. Does your business require occupational or professional licensing to own or work for the business?**

Yes .....	43%
No.....	55%
Not sure.....	2%

**20. Does your business contract or work with another company that requires you and/or your employees for your business to have occupational or professional licensing?**

Yes .....	36%
No.....	60%
Not sure.....	4%

Below are statements about occupational and professional licenses and state licensing boards. For each, indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statement.

**21. License denials should be governed by specific guidelines and regulations pertinent to that industry, not broad or subjective guidelines such as the applicant’s “good moral character,” as is the case in some states and for some boards.**

Strongly agree .....	48%
Somewhat agree .....	33%
Somewhat disagree .....	6%
Strongly disagree.....	3%
Don’t know .....	9%
Refused.....	1%
TOTAL AGREE .....	81%
TOTAL DISAGREE .....	9%

**22. State licensing boards should consider the nature of the offense when deciding whether to deny a license, rather denying a license broadly for any felony conviction.**

Strongly agree .....	63%
Somewhat agree .....	21%
Somewhat disagree .....	5%
Strongly disagree.....	5%
Don’t know .....	6%
Refused.....	0%
TOTAL AGREE .....	84%
TOTAL DISAGREE .....	10%

**23. Licensing boards should consider the length of time since an offense was committed in its considerations.**

Strongly agree .....	58%
Somewhat agree .....	27%
Somewhat disagree .....	8%
Strongly disagree.....	2%
Don’t know .....	5%
Refused.....	0%
TOTAL AGREE .....	85%
TOTAL DISAGREE .....	10%

**24. Business owners should have the ability to decide whether an employee’s criminal history should preclude them from working for them, not a state licensing board.**

Strongly agree .....	58%
Somewhat agree .....	26%
Somewhat disagree .....	7%
Strongly disagree.....	4%
Don’t know .....	5%
Refused.....	0%
TOTAL AGREE .....	84%
TOTAL DISAGREE .....	11%

**25. Licensing boards play an important role in public safety, protecting businesses from liability and ensuring a safe job candidate pool.**

Strongly agree .....	35%
Somewhat agree .....	42%
Somewhat disagree .....	6%
Strongly disagree.....	9%
Don’t know .....	8%
Refused.....	0%
TOTAL AGREE .....	77%
TOTAL DISAGREE .....	15%

**26. As a business owner and thinking about the impact a change in the law would have on your ability to hire qualified individuals, would you support or oppose reforms that would allow people with criminal records fairer access to occupational licenses?**

Strongly support.....	49%
Somewhat support .....	33%
Somewhat oppose .....	4%
Strongly oppose.....	5%
Don’t know .....	8%
Refused.....	1%
TOTAL SUPPORT .....	82%
TOTAL OPPOSE.....	9%

A few questions for statistical purposes...

**27. In what year were you born?**

Before 1960 .....	11%
1960 to 1969.....	15%
1970 to 1979 .....	22%
1980 to 1989.....	29%
1990 to 2000.....	21%
After 2000.....	2%

**28. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, or Independent?**

Republican .....	35%
Independent.....	34%
Democrat.....	17%
Other .....	7%
Don't know .....	3%
Refused.....	4%

**29. Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican Party or the Democratic Party?**

(If independent, other or don't know. N=44)

Closer to the Democratic Party .....	27%
Closer to the Republican Party.....	20%
Neither .....	48%
Don't know .....	2%
Refused.....	2%

**30. Which race do you identify with?**

Asian / Asian American / East Asian / South Asian / Southeast Asian .....	0%
Black / African or African American .....	24%
Hispanic / Latino / Spanish origin .....	1%
Middle Eastern / North African .....	0%
Native American / Alaska Native .....	1%
Native Hawaiian /Pacific Islander .....	0%
White / Caucasian .....	71%
Other .....	1%
Prefer not to answer.....	2%

**31. Is your business located in a rural area, a suburban area, or an urban area?**

Rural.....	41%
Suburban.....	30%
Urban .....	29%