

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE · TENNESSEE

Vehicle Registration, Plates and the January 1, 2027 Rule

Registration runs through the county clerk only. From January 1, 2027 an initial registration requires proof of lawful presence; renewals do not, yet the warning text is printed on every document.

SHORT ANSWER

Read three sentences together. First: registration applications are processed **only through the county clerk**, and the state's own sentence reads Applications for Registration are only processed through your local county clerk. Second: **from January 1, 2027** a county clerk may not process an **initial** registration without seeing documentation that the applicant is a **citizen, a lawful permanent resident or a person with temporary lawful presence**; the revenue department's notice reads This requirement does not apply to registration renewals, so **no document is required at renewal**. Third: **the warning text is printed on every registration and every renewal. Three separate searches found no lawsuit or injunction**; plan on the assumption that the date **will** be applied.

Today and after January 1, 2027: two tables

TRANSACTION	TODAY	AFTER JANUARY 1, 2027
Initial registration	Title and identification documents	Plus a lawful presence document
Renewal	Fee	No document required
Vehicle bought from a dealer	The dealer files on your behalf	The dealer must attach a copy of the document

The warning text will be on every document

The law requires the following statement to be printed on every registration and every renewal:

THE OWNER AND/OR OPERATOR OF THIS VEHICLE IS REQUIRED TO BE A UNITED STATES CITIZEN, LAWFUL PERMANENT RESIDENT, OR TEMPORARY LAWFUL RESIDENT.

You will see that sentence on your renewal paperwork too, even though no document is requested. Do not panic, and read what it actually says: no document is required at renewal; the statement is printed as a notice.

Which documents are accepted

- **Sufficient on their own:** a license compliant with the federal identification standard, a Tennessee driver license, a **Tennessee temporary driver license**, a Tennessee photo identification license and a **Tennessee temporary photo identification license**.
- If you hold no Tennessee document, the citizenship, permanent residence and temporary lawful presence lists are **the same as the license lists**: foreign passport, visa and arrival record; students and exchange visitors also present their program certificate; with the passport's **English translation**.
- The document may be **paper or electronic**; the agency accepts **an image on your phone**.
- **The most practical result:** if you hold a valid Tennessee temporary driver license you can still register a vehicle after 2027 without carrying anything else. A newcomer with no Tennessee document brings **passport, visa and arrival record**, with a translation if required.

WHERE THE DATA GOES: WE SAY NEITHER YES NOR NO HERE

- The same law provides for **data sharing between the state agency and county clerks**, and that part **took effect immediately**. The document is recorded, and a dealer transaction puts a copy in the file.
- **First:** there is **no provision in the text of the law** transferring that data to the immigration enforcement division.
- **Second:** the separate law creating the state's verification and reporting regime runs on the concept of a **public benefit**, and **driver licensing and vehicle registration do not appear to be items inside that definition**.
- **So we can say neither that the data goes to the immigration unit nor that it does not:** a channel has been created, and **the regulation that will fill it does not exist yet**.
- **Distrust sources that give a definitive answer** and ask your attorney about your own file.

Emissions testing: the program ended, but we do not write that there is none

Emissions testing used to be required in **six counties**. It ended in **five counties on January 14, 2022**, and in Davidson County emissions testing has not been required for registration, renewal or plate transactions **since February 5, 2022**. Shelby County, where Memphis sits, had already withdrawn from its own program earlier.

There is one thing we deliberately do not write here. The page of the agency that ran the program is no longer published, and **no sentence from an agency stating that emissions testing does not exist could be obtained**. So this guide does not say **there is none**; it says the program ended, and gives the dates. For **periodic safety inspection** no official item could be found either. **We say research did not find it, not that it does not exist**.

County wheel tax: a twofold difference inside one state

Your **county wheel tax** is collected together with registration. The mechanism: the tax is owed if the owner **resides** in that county, it is collected **by the county clerk at the same time as the state registration fee**, and

no plate decal is issued until it is paid. The county legislative body sets the rate.

COUNTY	ANNUAL AMOUNT FOR AN AUTOMOBILE
Williamson County	25.75 dollars
Sumner County	51.00 dollars
Rutherford County	52.50 dollars
Davidson County and Shelby County	Research found no verified figure

We give the source and the limit together: the three amounts above were read from the table published by the counties' technical assistance service on **October 12, 2026**. **Secondary sources circulate different numbers** and we relied on the table. **We publish no figure for the two large counties** because none could be verified. **Confirm all three with the county clerk;** changing counties changes this item directly. **The current amount of the state registration fee could not be verified either,** so we give no figure.

Mandatory insurance: electronic verification, but no figures

ITEM	DETAILS
The program	The state runs a program that verifies mandatory insurance electronically ; it is called Drive Insured TN and is run by the Tennessee Department of Revenue
Checking your own status	You can check it with your plate number and the vehicle identification number
If you get a notice	To respond or to pay you need the plate number and the number on the notice . Do not throw the notice away
Self-insurance	Possible two ways: a separate procedure for religious organizations and a separate procedure for companies
Minimum coverage limits	Could not be confirmed from the agency's own page in this research, so we publish no figure. Do not carry limits from our other state guides into this one; ask your agent for the state's current minimum and see it written in the policy
Prohibited rating factors	Some states have rules on what may not be used to calculate an insurance score. No such rule was measured for Tennessee in this research. We do not say there is none; we say we did not measure it

The order for a newcomer: start the policy first, then go to the registration counter. Make sure the policy is **written for Tennessee**; a policy opened in another state does not become valid here by itself when you move.

Toll roads and fake toll messages

Research found no toll road, bridge or tunnel operating today. An older state law prohibits charging tolls on roads and bridges built before that law. On the other hand, a 2023 road funding law opened the state to **optional tolled express lanes**: the general lanes stay free and a driver may choose the tolled lane. Two of the first proposed corridors are **between Nashville and Murfreesboro** and **between Nashville and Spring Hill**.

The opening date, the price level and the present state of the contracts could not be verified, so we publish no figure or date; **nor do we write flatly that Tennessee has no toll roads**.

Fake toll messages: a common nationwide scam sends text messages claiming an unpaid toll and pushes you to a link that collects card details. Since no toll road was found here, receiving such a message **is itself a signal**. **Do not tap the link and do not pay**; if you believe you owe something, type the agency's address yourself. Some of these messages collect **identity information** rather than money, and cleaning up an account opened in your name can reach your tax and credit records.

- 1 Start the policy before registration** and make sure it is written for Tennessee.
- 2 Go to the county clerk**; registration runs through no other door.
- 3 Finish your license file first**. A Tennessee temporary driver license is sufficient on its own at registration and makes life easier after 2027.
- 4 If the vehicle is registered in your name before 2027**, later renewals require no document; that difference is in your favor.
- 5 Ask for your county's wheel tax by giving your address**. No plate decal is issued until it is paid.
- 6 Keep any insurance notice the agency sends** and report address changes to your insurer as well.
- 7 Distrust definitive answers on the data question** and consult your attorney about your own file.



TURKISH-SPEAKING IMMIGRATION ATTORNEY IN TENNESSEE

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