



The Governor's Office of
**Faith-Based and
Community Initiatives**

Annual Impact Report

"I believe that one way that we do unite is by following the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. In fact, I believe it is the key to American greatness. Our greatness has never come from government compulsion or power. It's always come from our love for each other and our commitment to our fellow citizens and to our neighbors."

Tennessee Governor Bill Lee



A letter from our **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

DEAR FELLOW TENNESSEANS,

As I reflect on our journey through 2022-2023, it is clear that this year has been a profound period of connection and discovery. Since beginning as Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in September 2022, I've centered on two essential priorities: listening and discovery. The following Annual Impact Report reflects 1,000+ meetings with communities of faith, nonprofits, and state department leaders across Tennessee.

From the vibrant city of Memphis to the picturesque mountains of East Tennessee, I have witnessed firsthand the incredible compassion and commitment of those who are passionately addressing the needs of vulnerable Tennesseans. These experiences have not only highlighted the exceptional efforts of our communities but also exposed the systemic challenge that we must confront together – including the challenges of foster care and justice-impacted individuals, two priorities of Governor Bill Lee.

Over the past year, I've engaged in 1,000+ in person meetings,

spanning large gatherings and intimate discussions, and traveled to nearly all 95 counties. Each conversation and visit was an opportunity to listen deeply, understand unique challenges, and strategize on building impactful coalitions. This effort required not just dialogue, but a genuine curiosity and commitment to uncovering the core needs of those we serve.

As we transition into 2023-2024, the groundwork laid this past year will be instrumental in creating progress on our discoveries. We are now well-positioned to develop and enhance the infrastructure necessary to address the needs of vulnerable communities with whom we've had the privilege to engage.

Thank you for your continued partnership and dedication to our mission. Together, we will move forward with purpose and resolve.



Lance Villio
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Appointed by Governor Bill Lee

Uniting for Impact:

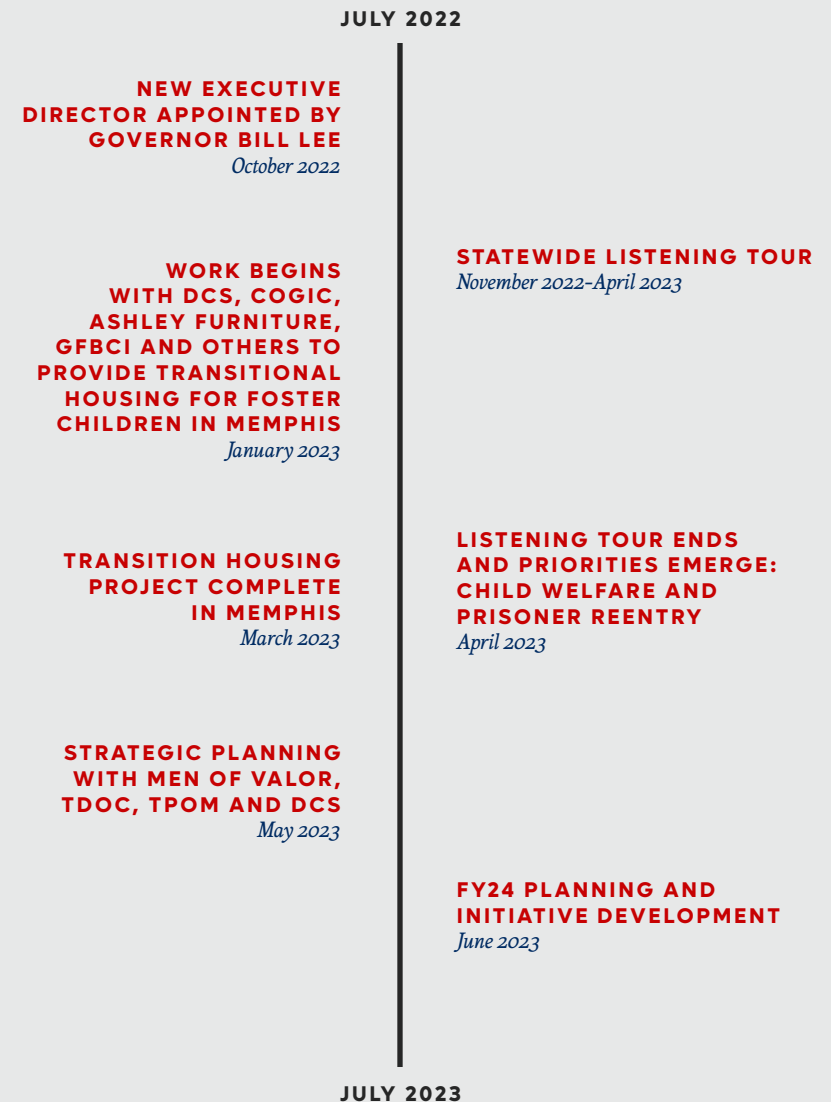
STRENGTHENING TENNESSEE THROUGH GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

IN RESPONSE TO GOVERNOR LEE'S VISION

The Tennessee State Legislature implemented the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to leverage the power and possibilities of Tennessee's faith communities and non-profit organizations — in partnership with state government — to address the state's most challenging issues.

With over 11,500 houses of worship and 30,000+ socially engaged non-profit organizations across Tennessee, the office is uniquely positioned as a nimble and proactive problem-solver for the state's diverse challenges— from prisoner reentry to foster care, as well as other important challenges.

Timeline of Activity



COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

In a dedicated effort to fortify partnerships between state government and community nonprofits, we embarked on an extensive listening tour this past year. The purpose of this initiative was to engage directly with hundreds of nonprofit organizations throughout Tennessee, gaining insight into their operations, challenges, and the populations they serve.

Through these meetings, we explored the current landscape of nonprofit-government collaboration and discussed opportunities to enhance our joint efforts in serving communities more effectively. The tour provided a platform for these organizations to voice their experiences and needs in working with the government, ensuring their invaluable feedback informs our strategies and actions.

This endeavor underscores our commitment to not only understand but also actively support and strengthen the vital work carried out by community organizations across our state. The insights gathered are instrumental as we continue to build more resilient and responsive partnerships that can better meet the needs of all Tennesseans.



FAITH COMMUNITIES

The history of Tennessee is deeply rooted in faithful people rising to meet daunting and difficult challenges – from the early circuit-riding Methodist ministers to the establishment of higher education to the struggle for Civil Rights.

Today, over 11,500 houses of worship across Tennessee are centers of compassion and service for millions of faithful Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, Islamic, and other religious traditions. Faith-based organizations are feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, caring for at-risk moms and children, supporting foster children and youth, providing health and dental care, protecting and restoring women from human trafficking, resourcing those trapped in addiction and mental health challenges, employing veterans, and countless other acts of service in all 95 counties.

The Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives is designed to unite, mobilize, and serve these indispensable organizations as they do their good work across Tennessee. We know that these faith communities often work in silos, under-resourced and under-appreciated, and disconnected from state departments and one another. In our year of listening and discovery, we received hundreds of recommendations for how faith communities and state departments can move more effectively and efficiently to serve vulnerable Tennesseans.



Faith Communities

Continuing our engagement with diverse faith communities, we had the honor of meeting with two esteemed Swamis from the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir. This pivotal meeting marked the inception of a fruitful partnership centered on community well-being. Our discussions laid the groundwork for a significant initiative where their community rallied to support vulnerable children through a comprehensive food drive. This collaboration not only addressed immediate needs but also reinforced our commitment to interfaith dialogue and cooperation, showcasing the powerful impact of uniting diverse communities to serve a common good. By fostering these connections, we highlight the essential role of collective effort in enhancing the lives of those we serve.



At a heartfelt gathering at the Islamic Center of Nashville, we united during the holy month of Ramadan for an Iftar celebration. This event not only symbolized our solidarity but also served as a crucial opportunity to deepen our understanding of the vital community engagement efforts spearheaded by our partners at the Islamic Center. Through thoughtful dialogue, we explored ways the state can support and amplify their initiatives, reinforcing our commitment to fostering inclusive community support across all faith-based organizations. This meeting underscored the strength found in our diversity and the shared values that unite us in service to the people of Tennessee.





In a significant gathering hosted by The Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, over twenty distinguished clergy gathered at the state capitol alongside Governor Bill Lee and Commissioner Margie Quin of the Department of Children's Services. This pivotal meeting focused on our collective efforts to enhance the care and support for children in foster care. Through detailed discussions, we explored ways to harness the unique resources of faith-based communities to improve outcomes for vulnerable children, youth, and families. This event highlighted the essential role of faith leaders in our communities and reaffirmed our office's commitment to nurturing and protecting Tennessee's children.

"We have to seek forgiveness for abdicating our responsibility to government to care for our children"

Senior Pastor
Brentwood Baptist
Mike Glen

Partnering with **STATE GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS**

After more than four hundred meetings with faith communities, nonprofit organizations, and state government leaders across the state, two clear priorities emerged with urgent significance: child welfare and prisoner mentorship. This insight led us to initiate the following coalition-building efforts.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

Throughout the year, we engaged in a deliberate discovery process with the Department of Correction. Through this, we learned that approximately 10,000 adults are released from incarceration every year in the State of Tennessee.

Given these staggering statistics, we continued our research and learning through leaders in the field and the community. We discovered that the alarmingly high rate of recidivism is consistently caused by three primary factors:

- **Lack of Access to Community-Driven Mentorship and Support**
- **Lack of Workforce Development and Job Opportunities**
- **Housing Insecurity**

98% of those incarcerated will be released

24,970 Adults incarcerated in TN State Prisons FY22-FY23

70% of children with a parent who is incarcerated will end up in prison

\$111.53 Average cost per day to house a TDOC offender

Partnering with **STATE GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS**

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

As we began working closely with DCS and the work of TN Fosters Hope, we discovered urgent needs within the Department of Children's Services (DCS). We identified two immediate priorities that we could aid in:

- 1) providing meals**
- 2) addressing urgent housing needs**



"Hundreds and hundreds of volunteers have come to the table to serve our kids because of the Governor's Faith Based and Community Initiative"

Commissioner
Margie Quin, DCS

In response, we swiftly mobilized our expanding network of faith community partners, delivering **1,000** meals to foster children across Tennessee in record time. Our second priority focused on the critical situation of children awaiting placement in Memphis who were forced to sleep in DCS offices. This challenge led to a swift and impactful

collaboration with the Church of God in Christ, exemplifying the power of dynamic partnerships in meeting pressing needs.



WATCH: The incredible story of faith-based communities, non-profit organizations, private sector businesses, and state government working together to solve an urgent housing crisis for foster kids in Tennessee.

2022 - 23 BUDGET

This fiscal year, our office budget was \$337,033, which was entirely sourced from private donations. The primary use of our budget was directed towards payroll expenses, totaling \$258,460, to support the salaries of our two dedicated staff members.

We are pleased to report that we have maintained a strong financial standing throughout the year, effectively managing our resources to support our mission. Looking ahead, we anticipate the opportunity to expand our capacity through a potential state grant. This prospective funding will enable us to further our work with community and faith-based organizations, ultimately enhancing our collaborative impact across Tennessee.

Office budget

\$337,033

Payroll expenses

\$258,460

Program expenses

\$24,800

2022 - 23 STAFF

During this past year of Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives first budgeted year, the staff has consisted of Executive Director Lance Villio and part time administrative assistant Emma Campbell.



Lance Villio

Executive Director

Appointed by Governor Lee of Tennessee, Lance Villio serves as the Executive Director for the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. In this pivotal role, he functions as the liaison between state government, faith-based groups, and community nonprofits. His primary focus is on forging partnerships that address Tennessee's most pressing community needs.

Before stepping into his current role, Villio was the CEO of Think Native, a mentoring software designed to improve the lives of those in recovery. He has also held leadership positions in national faith-based organizations such as Q Ideas and I Am Second. Notably, he was the founding employee at RestoreNYC, where he was instrumental in establishing the first safe house in New York City for international victims of sex trafficking.

Residing in Franklin, Tennessee, with his wife, Hannah, and their three children, the Villio family is deeply committed to their community. Hannah serves as the PTO co-president, emphasizing their shared commitment to public education and community engagement. Guided by strong convictions, Lance Villio uses his expertise in strategy and execution to create partnerships that meaningfully improve the lives of Tennesseans.

Emma Campbell

Executive Assistant



CLOSING

REMARKS FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR LANCE VILLIO

It's not hard to marvel at Tennessee's natural wonders and vibrant culture, or to find an "everything is possible" aspiration and small town Sunday morning spirit among Tennesseans.

We see it every day, in every one of our 95 counties, along every stretch of 432 miles from east to west.

One could say that is what makes Tennessee, truly Tennessee. Its storied mountains and rivers, its music and food circling the globe, its Main Streets and Broad Ways that beckon innovators and industries are what make it unique.

And all that would be true, but not complete.

It is and always has been that here, in the Volunteer State, the people are what makes Tennessee truly special.

Nearly 200 years ago, the French traveler Alexis de Tocqueville and his companion, stopped in Hollow Rock Tennessee ... while he worked on his journal, *Democracy in America*.

He wrote in that journal, "I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her harbors and rivers, in fields and prairies ... in mines and world commerce ... and it was not there. Not until I went to the churches"

In other words, not until he went to the people, saw their passion and purpose ... did he fully understand the secret of this land's genius and power.

Four years ago, on his first day in office, Governor Lee shared his vision for Tennessee.

He said that government is not the answer to our greatest challenges. That government has a role, a limited role, one that provides unlimited opportunity for “we the people” to address the greatest challenges of our day.

The truth is that most of the things that have created the greatness of Tennessee don’t have very much to do with government at all.

Our strength – or in de Tocqueville’s words – our genius and power, have always come from our people, those who believe that everything is possible in Tennessee.

In 2019, the Governor established the Governor’s Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. The goal was to invite those faith and community organizations, already doing so much, to tell us how we can help – to go further, faster, more personally – to solve some of our state’s most pressing challenges: the 8,500 kids in foster care who deserve a forever home, the 10,000 prisoners released each year who need a mentor and community, those struggling with addiction or housing or workforce training, they are not numbers or case files. They are our neighbors and friends, our families and our future.

We know that communities of faith and service offer hope and healing. They are the first responders for second chances. They go where the government cannot go. They do what bureaucracies cannot do. Our greatest resource, our natural wonder, are the people of this state.

That is the charge of the Governor’s Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. In the coming year we will begin to take our learnings and discovery to launch new initiatives, particularly

around foster care, volunteer mentorship in state prisons, and more partnerships with state departments to help every Tennessean flourish.

That is what unites us as Tennesseans, along every rural road and urban boulevard. The challenges are great. But seven million volunteers are greater still – so many have stepped-up, and stepped in, without recognition, and often without resources. We will do more to help them and invite others to join in.

Everything is possible in Tennessee. We believe that. We really do. The Governor is right: the people are the secret of our genius and power. You and me, all of us, can come together, uniting to care for the most vulnerable in our state.

We have considerable work ahead, but our momentum from this year is strong. I am confident that we are building something unique in the nation.



The Governor’s Office of
**Faith-Based and
Community Initiatives**

WILLIAM R. SNODGRASS TENNESSEE TOWER
312 Rosa L. Parks Ave., 16th Floor, Nashville, TN 37234



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