



# Office of Small Business Advocate

## 2014 Annual Report

July 1, 2014

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Dear Members of the 108th General Assembly,

The 2014 Annual Report of the Office of Small Business Advocate 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. Over the last three years, the Office has worked to improve small business owners' interactions with their state government in Tennessee. Thank you for your consideration of this report, and please do not hesitate to contact the Office if you have any questions.

Lauren Plunk  
Small Business Advocate

## HISTORY OF THE OFFICE

Public Chapter 1129, 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 small business owners to state government. The mission of the Comptroller's Office is to improve the quality of life for all Tennesseans by making government work better. The Office of the Small Business Advocate supports the mission by making government work better for Tennessee's small business owners.

## GOALS

The Office of Small Business Advocate's goals include:

- To answer questions and provide information to residents of this state who are starting a small business or who already own a small business;
- To informally mediate and assist with the resolution of issues concerning small business owners and state departments or agencies;
- To work with each state agency and department that has regulatory authority over businesses to ensure that small business owners who receive or are subject to an audit, on-site inspection, compliance assistance, or other enforcement related communication or contact by agency personnel are provided with a means to communicate or comment on the enforcement activity;
- To establish means to receive comments from small business owners regarding actions by agency or department employees conducting compliance or enforcement activities; and
- To establish means to refer comments from small business owners to the contact person of the affected agency or department in the appropriate circumstances and to maintain the confidentiality of the identity of the person making such comments.

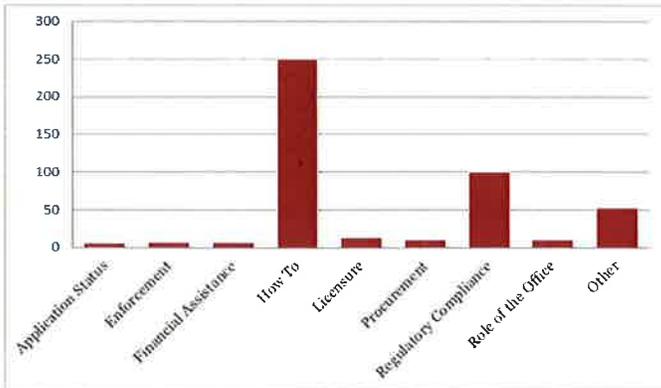
## INQUIRIES BY THE NUMBERS

- Since its creation, the Office has assisted in resolving more than **1,000** inquiries.
- From July 1, 2013—June 30, 2014, the Office assisted small businesses with **459** inquiries: a **41%** increase from last year.
- Awareness of the Office continues to improve - on average, the Office has increased contact with small business owners each year since 2010 by approximately **53%**.

## RAISING AWARENESS

- On November 12, 2013 the Office hosted a State Agency Roundtable in conjunction with the Department of Economic and Community Development to foster collaboration between state agencies.
- In the fall of 2013, the Office participated in the National Better Government Competition focused on facilitating job creation in America.
- The Office continues to receive much media attention including being featured in interviews, articles, and newspaper columns.
- The Office continues to meet with community groups and civic organizations across the state.

## INQUIRIES BY TOPIC



## EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS AND ISSUES

### Application Status (5):

- Can you check on the status of a particular application that I filed?

### Enforcement (8):

- The Department is telling me that I owe this amount in taxes or fees. Can you assist me with resolving this issue?
- The Department is telling me that I am required to get this type of licensure or permit. I disagree; can you assist me with resolving this issue?
- The Department is taking action that is unfair or overly burdensome. Can you assist me with resolving this issue?

### Financial Assistance (8):

- Is there financial assistance, grant money, or a loan program available to start a particular type of small business?

### “How To” Questions (250):

- How do I open a business in Tennessee?
- How do I register with the State for business or sales tax purposes?
- What is the appropriate form to file in this situation?

### Licensure (14):

- Do I need a license to operate this type of business?
- What are the requirements to receive this type of licensure?
- How does the licensure application process work?

### Procurement (10):

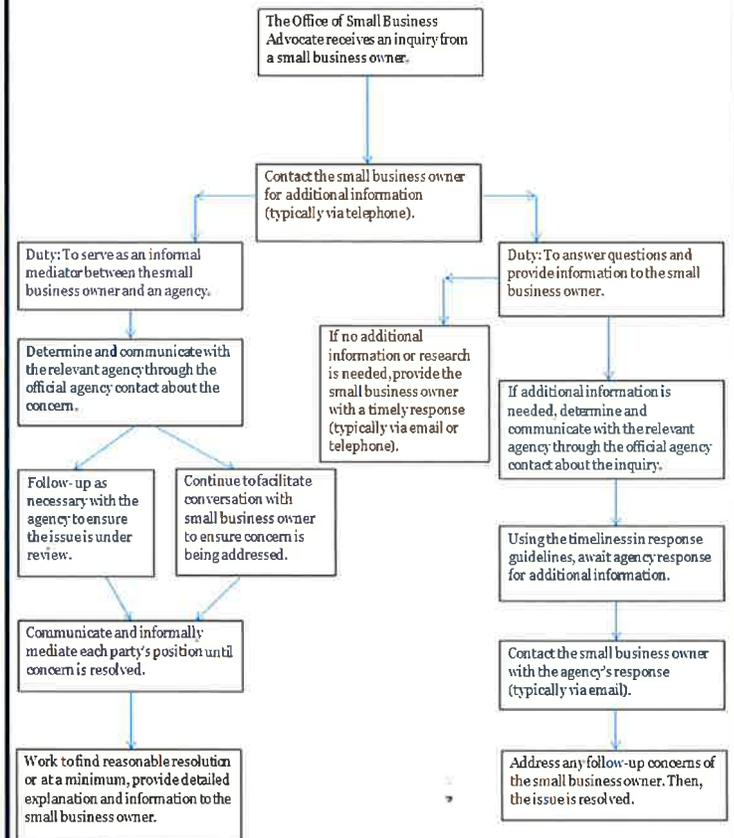
- How do I register to do business with the State?
- What certifications are available to small businesses?

### Regulatory Compliance (101):

- What are the regulatory obligations to open a particular type of business?
- Do I need to collect sales tax for this type of business activity?
- How do I close out my business?

## INQUIRY PROCESS

The Office provides advice and guidance to small business owners. All issues are addressed through phone calls and/or emails.



## IMPORTANT LINKS

### Agency Comment Form:

[www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA/feedback.asp](http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA/feedback.asp)

### Agency Contacts:

[www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA/ContactList.asp](http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA/ContactList.asp)

### Office of Small Business Advocate Frequently Asked Questions:

[www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA/FAQ.asp](http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA/FAQ.asp)

### Office of Small Business Advocate Publications:

[www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA/publications.asp](http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA/publications.asp)

### Office of Small Business Advocate Statutory Authority:

[www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA/Law .asp](http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/OSBA/Law .asp)

## AGENCY CONTACTS

As required by Tennessee Code Annotated § 8-4-703, thirty (30) state departments and agencies report having regulatory authority over business and have provided the Office of Small Business Advocate with a contact person. These contacts assist in the resolution of issues involving their agency. A complete list of agency contacts is available on our website.

## AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS

Tennessee Code Annotated § 8-4-705 requires the Office of Small Business Advocate to annually evaluate and report to the General Assembly on state government's responsiveness to small business owners' concerns. On January 1, 2013, a rating system for timeliness of response was implemented. The ratings are for the period July 1, 2013–June 30, 2014.

### TIMELINESS IN RESPONSE

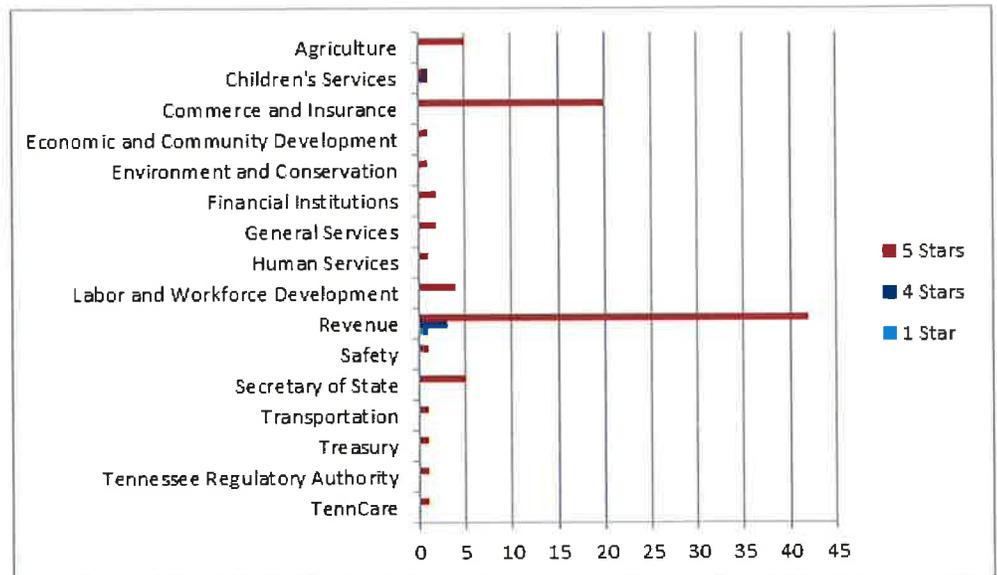
**5 STARS** = response provided within seven days or less.

**4 STARS** = response provided in seven to fourteen days.

**1 STAR** = response provided in fifteen to thirty days.

Responses are calculated from the day a comment is forwarded to the agency until the day the Office of Small Business Advocate receives a response.

*Agencies not listed did not receive a relevant inquiry during the period July 1, 2013 –June 30, 2014.*



## INTRODUCTION OF NEW SMALL BUSINESS ADVOCATE



Dear Members of the 108th General Assembly,

I look forward to continuing to work with you as the new Small Business Advocate. My goal is to continue to ensure small business owners' interactions with state government in Tennessee are positive. If I can ever be of assistance to you or the small businesses you serve, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached by telephone at 615.401.7746 or by email at [richard.wilson@cot.tn.gov](mailto:richard.wilson@cot.tn.gov).

Richard Wilson  
Small Business Advocate

*Richard Wilson joined the Office of Small Business Advocate as Small Business Assistant in May of 2013. Prior to joining the Comptroller's office, Richard worked for the Tennessee General Assembly in the Chief Clerk's office of the House of Representatives during the 2013 session. As Small Business Assistant, Richard has assisted in all aspects of the Office of Small Business Advocate including working with small businesses to address questions, provide information, and informally mediate issues between business owners and state agencies.*