



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **2021 Highlights: Accomplishments, Investments and Celebrating 225 Years of Statehood**

**NASHVILLE, Tenn.** – Today, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee released 2021 highlights that contributed to greater prosperity, freedom, and opportunity for Tennesseans.

“From securing the largest economic investment in state history, to reducing the number of distressed counties to an all-time low, we have worked together with Tennesseans for one of the strongest years in state history,” said Gov. Lee. “We thank members in the General Assembly for their partnership and look forward to building on this success in 2022.”

In addition to legislative priorities and investments, Gov. Lee launched a 95-county tour commemorating 225 years of Statehood through the year-long, [Untold Tennessee](#) celebration. Since June 1, there have been events in 51 counties with remaining county stops planned in 2022.

“Our best days happen when we are on the ground with Tennesseans serving in their communities,” said Lee. “This year, Maria’s TN Serves Initiative served distressed counties by delivering more than 190,000 meals, more than 5,000 backpacks for school children and nearly 1,000 pairs of shoes for kids.”

Photo highlights from the year may be viewed [here](#). Major accomplishments and investments from 2021 include:

- **Rural Development**
  - Reduced the number of distressed counties to nine, a 52% decrease in four years
  - Allocated \$500 million to provide high-speed broadband to every Tennessean
  - Invested \$79 million to eliminate the 11,400 TCAT waiting list for high-skill, high-wage, and high-demand jobs and increased apprenticeships by more than 30% across the state
  - Awarded second round of GIVE grants which will fund 27 projects statewide, serving all economically distressed counties and 25 of the 30 at-risk counties.

- **Economic Development**
  - Returned to pre-pandemic unemployment rate of 4%, the lowest since March 2020, and ended the year with six consecutive months of decreasing unemployment
  - Tennesseans enjoy the lowest state and local tax burden per capita
  - Secured 130 economic projects representing nearly 35,000 job commitments and nearly \$13 billion in capital investment
  - Landed the largest economic investment in Tennessee history by recruiting Ford Motor Company to the Megasite of West Tennessee
  - Attracted major business relocation and expansions including Ford Motor Company, Ultium Cells, LLC, Smith & Wesson, Chewy, and Amazon
- **K-12 Education**
  - Increased the teacher salary component of the BEP by 4%
  - Invested \$250 million in the Mental Health Trust Fund
  - Invested over \$160 million in academic summer camps to address learning loss resulting in more than 120,000 Tennessee students receiving aid, increasing results for elementary students by more than 7 percentage points for English and language arts and more than 11 percentage points for math
  - Ensured a phonics-based approach for kindergarten through third grade reading instruction to increase early literacy skills
- **Supporting National Security**
  - Increased transparency in foreign investment at Tennessee's universities and prohibited Confucius Institutes
  - Visited 300 Tennessee National Guard personnel on the Southwest Border
  - Authorized deployment of approximately 50 additional Tennessee National Guard personnel to the U.S. Southern Border to curb the surging drug crisis
- **Public Safety**
  - Protected the Second Amendment by extending law-abiding Tennesseans' constitutional right to carry a handgun and increased penalties for gun related crime
  - Made significant investments to support our law enforcement and corrections workers
  - Allocated over \$5 million in funding for key groups fighting human trafficking and supporting victims including End Slavery TN and Her Song, a Ministry of the Tim Tebow Foundation
  - Provided alternatives to incarceration, increased transparency in the parole process, and enhanced practices that support successful post-release
  - Granted executive clemency for 17 offenders who have demonstrated a successful path to rehabilitation
- **Supporting Families**
  - Invested over \$3.5 million in pro-life initiatives to support women, children, and families
  - Launched TN Fosters Hope which has established supports that will help provide services to more than 300 children who have been adopted out of foster care and to more than 800 new foster homes
  - Continued to fight for the unborn by defending Tennessee's comprehensive pro-life legislation in Federal Court
  - Reformed the Tennessee Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to promote economic mobility and improve outcomes for recipients
- **Health Care**

- Secured federal approval for Tennessee’s Medicaid “Block Grant” waiver to improve the health of TennCare members
- Allocated up to \$400 million of federal CMS COVID-19 relief funds to Tennesseans with disabilities to increase home and community-based services for older adults and individuals with disabilities
- **Top 10 National Accolades**
  - Ranked in the top five of the CATO Institute’s [Freedom in the 50 States Report](#)
  - Recognized by the [Foundation for Government Accountability](#) for supercharging Tennessee’s economic recovery by ending expanded unemployment benefits
  - Named Best Dealmaker State of the Year by [Business Facilities](#)
  - Ranked number one for long-term fiscal stability by [US News & World Report](#)
  - Recognized as the top state for workforce development in the south-central region by [Site Selection Magazine](#)
  - Ranked number eight in the [Tax Foundation’s 2022 Business Climate Index](#), a ten-spot improvement from 2021
- **Good Government**
  - Reduced state agency spending by more than \$180 million
  - Tennesseans benefited from tax savings of \$415 million in sales tax holiday purchases
  - Named the leading example for Evaluation Leadership and Governance by [Results for America](#)
- **Tennessee Natural Resources, Beauty, and Attractions**
  - Gatlinburg earned the title of Top Trending Destination in America by [Trip Advisor](#)
  - The Smoky Mountain National Park ranked the most-visited National Park by [USA Today](#)

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