



Tennessee's Senate Bill 2099 Would Reduce Costly Failures to Appear and Improve Efficiency

Each year, Tennessee courts handle more than 150,000 criminal cases requiring court appearances. Thousands more traffic cases are heard annually in local courts across the state. Failure to appear in court may result in suspended licenses, arrest warrants, and jail admissions that disrupt employment, divert law enforcement resources away from serious public safety threats, and consume taxpayer dollars. Court appearance reminder systems, like the one established by Senate Bill 2099, offer a proven solution that benefits defendants, courts, and communities by preventing many failures to appear due to forgetfulness or lack of information.

Failure to Appear in Court Is a Leading Cause of Driver's License Suspensions, Bench Warrants, Arrests, and Jail Admissions.

- Under [Tennessee law](#), failure to appear is a Class A misdemeanor offense.
- In traffic cases, the Department of Safety is [authorized](#) to suspend a driver's license when a court reports that a driver failed to appear to answer or satisfy a traffic citation.

Research Shows that Small Improvements to Court Reminders Can Reduce Failures to Appear and Improve Efficiency.

- Each missed court date is conservatively [estimated](#) to cost the government \$1,496 in staff time and other costs.
- A recent [randomized controlled trial](#) found that sending text message reminders about upcoming court dates reduced failures to appear by 21%, resulting in 30,000 fewer arrest warrants over a three-year period.
- Reminder systems work best when they reach defendants through multiple channels, send multiple reminders (including a reminder 24-48 hours before the hearing), and include clear information about date, time, location, and consequences of nonappearance.

SB 2099 Creates a Statewide, Automated Court Reminder Program Designed Around Best Practices.

- The bill directs the Administrative Office of the Courts to develop and administer a free, statewide court appearance reminder program for defendants with out-of-custody appearances in criminal and traffic cases.
- The program requires a minimum of three reminders before each court date and must include the date, time, location, court name, consequences of nonappearance, and contact information for assistance. These requirements align with the practices [research identifies](#) as most effective.
- Courts with existing reminder systems that meet the bill's standards may continue using them.

Bottom line: States and localities should implement evidence-based court reminder systems as a cost-effective way to reduce unnecessary license suspensions, warrants, and jail admissions while improving court efficiency.

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