

# Knox County Commission



## PRESS RELEASE

***For Immediate Release: August 15, 2023***

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### **Knox County Commissioner Kyle Ward Asks State to Use Bridge to Nowhere Money for Mental Health**

*KNOXVILLE, Tenn.* — Knox County Commissioner Kyle Ward has sent a letter to Knox County’s state legislative delegation asking that they repurpose the \$20 million grant for a pedestrian bridge connecting the University of Tennessee to the South Knoxville waterfront. The grant was included in Governor Bill Lee’s budget that was adopted last spring by legislators.

The bridge plan, spearheaded by the Knoxville Mayor Indya Kincannon, encountered a hiccup when the city lost out on \$25 million additional dollars in the form of a federal grant that it had expected to be awarded.

The future of the bridge plan remains unknown.

Knox County has over 800 homeless individuals living on the streets. The last long term public mental health facility in the county closed over a decade ago.

“It’s deeply disturbing to me that as a community we would prioritize a vanity project like the pedestrian bridge over the safety and well-being of our people. I hope that our wise and capable legislators will consider clawing back the money appropriated for the bridge and instead invest in our growing mental health and homelessness crisis in a meaningful way.” Ward said.

# Knox County Commission



August 7, 2023

**KYLE WARD**  
COMMISSIONER, FOURTH DISTRICT

*The Honorable Bill Lee,*  
Governor of Tennessee  
State Capitol Building, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor  
600 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd  
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Governor Lee,

The Majority Whip in the Tennessee House of Representatives, Johnny Garrett, has stated he and other members of the state legislature "desire to address mental illness through treatment and resources for those who may be a threat to themselves or others."

As a member of the Knox County Commission, I know a great number of our people recognize the need to do something meaningful about the problem of homelessness and mental illness. As a former member of the armed services, I would say the primary responsibility of our government is to protect the welfare and safety of our citizens. It is also clear municipal and county governments, especially in the urban counties, need the help of our state government. There is a pressing and profound need for a mental health facility in Knox County. No other proposed solution would address the homeless problem in our urban areas better than having a facility where individuals can be treated for mental illness and/or addiction-related problems. It would allow our local judges, especially with a court specifically to address mental illness, have a facility where they have the option to send those who need it.

Governor Bill Lee, I urge you to please earmark \$20 million to build and begin staffing a facility for treatment of those mentally ill and homeless folks who are afflicted with addiction-related problems. If the state of Tennessee has the money to help fund a third bridge for UT, it certainly has the necessary funds for a far more important service to our citizenry.

I believe Mayor Glenn Jacobs, Sheriff Tom Spangler, and the members of the Knox County Commission will do their part in making this urgent need a reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kyle Ward".

KYLE WARD

Cc: Mayor Glenn Jacobs  
Sheriff Tom Spangler  
Members, Knox County Commission  
State Delegation of General Assembly

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