

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2019 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 996
Ways and Means

(Delegate Cain)

Election Law - Absentee Ballot Deposit Boxes

This bill requires that each early voting center provide a secure and locked deposit box for the return of absentee ballots. In addition, each local board of elections, in accordance with State election law and State Board of Elections (SBE) regulations, must designate at least one site in the county for the location of a secure and locked deposit box for the return of absentee ballots on Election Day. **The bill takes effect June 1, 2019.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None.

Local Effect: Local government expenditures may increase collectively by over \$100,000 in FY 2020, with lesser ongoing costs in future years. **The bill imposes a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Current Law: An individual may vote by absentee ballot except to the extent preempted by federal law. An absentee ballot may be requested in writing (there are State and federal forms that can be used) or online through the SBE website. The voter may choose to receive the ballot by mail, by fax, through the Internet, or by hand at a local board of elections office. The voter may return the ballot by mailing it, postmarked on or before Election Day, or delivering it to the local board of elections in person by the close of polls on Election Day.

Local Fiscal Effect: Local government expenditures may increase collectively by over \$100,000 in fiscal 2020 to meet the requirements of the bill. This estimate is based on the following information:

- Costs for an outdoor ballot deposit box may be in the range of \$700 (portable but securable) to \$1,000 (larger but less portable).
- 24 secure and locked deposit boxes are purchased (one in each county) for the return of absentee ballots on Election Day. At a cost of \$1,000 each, the collective cost for the counties is \$24,000.
- 110 more portable, secure and locked deposit boxes are purchased (in proportion to the number of early voting centers in each county – 79 total – with one or two spares per county), for the return of absentee ballots at early voting centers. At a cost of \$700 each, the collective cost for the counties is \$77,000.

Counties may also incur lesser ongoing costs for maintenance and delivery of the deposit boxes and minimal staff costs to monitor and periodically empty the Election Day deposit boxes.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: SB 304 (Senator Kagan) - Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs.

Information Source(s): State Board of Elections; Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Charles, Frederick, and Montgomery counties; Department of Legislative Services

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md/hlb

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