

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2021 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
First Reader

House Bill 493  
Ways and Means

(Delegate Guyton)

---

Election Law - Voting Locations - Accessibility by Public Transportation and  
Voters With Disabilities

---

This bill requires – in a county that has fixed-route public transportation service – that priority be given to locating ballot drop boxes, polling places, and early voting centers not more than 500 feet from a public transportation station or stop. In addition, each ballot drop box must be placed in a manner that is accessible to voters with disabilities, including voters using wheelchairs. The bill defines “ballot drop box” as a secure, durable, outdoor container that is officially designated by a local board of elections exclusively for voters to deposit completed absentee ballots in person.

---

Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** The bill does not directly affect State finances.

**Local Effect:** Local government expenditures are expected to increase, as discussed below. **This bill may impose a mandate on a unit of local government.**

**Small Business Effect:** None.

---

Analysis

**Current Law:**

*Designation of Polling Places*

State law authorizes local boards of elections to (1) create and alter the boundaries for precincts in the county; (2) designate the location for polling places in any election district,

ward, or precinct in the county; and (3) combine or abolish precincts. Each polling place must be located as conveniently as practicable for the majority of registered voters assigned to the polling place. A local board may create a new precinct or make a change in a precinct boundary or polling place only in accordance with regulations adopted by the State Board of Elections (SBE), which, for polling places, require a polling place accessibility survey and notice to affected voters.

### *Designation of Early Voting Centers*

Pursuant to statute, each early voting center must satisfy general requirements that apply to polling places, including that each polling place must be located as conveniently as practicable for the majority of registered voters assigned to the polling place.

No later than six months before a primary election, SBE, in collaboration with the local board in each county, must designate each early voting center in that county.

SBE regulations require local boards of elections to submit to SBE, at least seven months before a primary election, a form for each proposed early voting center that includes information on, among other things, whether the proposed early voting center:

- is located within specified distances of where specified percentages of the registered voters in the county live;
- is served by public transportation and roads; and
- has parking facilities sufficient for early voting taking into consideration the normal business activities of the proposed early voting center.

Upon receipt of a form for a proposed early voting center, the SBE regulations require the State Administrator to review the form and make a recommendation to SBE as to whether to accept or reject the proposed early voting center. Under the regulations, SBE must vote on a local board's proposed early voting center within 30 days of receipt of the form and give deference to a proposed early voting center that meets the criteria on the form.

**Local Fiscal Effect:** Local government expenditures increase to the extent that (1) locating ballot drop boxes, polling places, or early voting centers within 500 feet of a public transportation station or stop increases local boards of elections costs, in comparison to other locations and/or (2) the bill requires evaluation and relocation of existing ballot drop box locations, polling places, or early voting centers that would not otherwise be relocated for other reasons (*e.g.*, redistricting, in the case of polling places).

Montgomery and Calvert counties, for example, provided estimates for the purchase and installation of security cameras for ballot drop boxes that, under the bill are placed in locations within 500 feet of a public transportation station or stop without existing security,

but otherwise would be placed in locations with existing security. Montgomery County indicated that the costs for a security camera can vary depending on a number of variables, but provided an estimated cost of \$5,800 per camera (one per ballot drop box), based on the county's actual cost for a camera installed in 2020. Calvert County provided an estimated cost of \$2,300 per camera.

To the extent the bill requires evaluation and relocation of ballot drop box locations, polling places, or early voting centers that would not otherwise be relocated, counties incur personnel costs for work associated with the relocation, and costs of notifying affected voters of relocation of any polling places. Montgomery County, for example, estimates that relocating five polling places, five ballot drop boxes, and one early voting center increases expenditures by \$46,500 in fiscal 2022, consisting of \$4,400 in temporary staff and overtime costs for site surveys and other tasks associated with changing voting locations, \$13,100 in mailing costs to notify affected voters of the five relocated polling places, and \$29,000, for installation of security cameras for the five relocated ballot drop boxes. The county's expenditures increase by a greater amount if a greater amount of relocation of voting locations is required under the bill.

---

### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Designated Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** State Board of Elections; Maryland Department of Transportation; Baltimore City; Calvert, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - January 31, 2021  
rh/hlb

---

Analysis by: Scott D. Kennedy

Direct Inquiries to:  
(410) 946-5510  
(301) 970-5510