

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2024 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 1353
Ways and Means

(Howard County Delegation)

Howard County - Board of Education Elections - Ranked-Choice Voting
Ho. Co. 6-24

This bill authorizes the Howard County Council to adopt, by law, a ranked-choice voting system for elections for the Howard County Board of Education. “Ranked-choice voting” means a method of casting and tabulating votes in which voters rank candidates in order of preference and votes are tabulated in a manner that reflects voter preference. The local law adopting a ranked-choice voting system must provide for an educational campaign explaining how to vote using ranked-choice voting and may provide for (1) the ballot format; (2) procedures for tabulating votes; and (3) any other provision necessary to implement ranked-choice voting. **The bill takes effect June 1, 2024.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: If a ranked-choice voting system is adopted in Howard County for the 2026 elections, general fund expenditures increase by approximately \$54,000 in FY 2026 and by varying amounts in future years.

Local Effect: If a ranked-choice voting system is adopted in Howard County for the 2026 elections, Howard County expenditures increase by approximately \$839,000 in FY 2026. Costs are incurred in future years but at a reduced overall level.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Current Law:

Howard County Board of Education

The Howard County Board of Education consists of seven elected members and one student member. Of the seven elected members, (1) one member is elected from each of the five councilmanic districts in the county, elected by the voters of that district and (2) two members are elected at large by the voters of the county. The terms of the elected members are staggered, and each term of office begins on the first Monday in December after the election of a member and until a successor is elected and qualifies. The term of office of each member elected from a councilmanic district, beginning at the 2020 election, is four years. The term of office of each member elected at large, beginning at the 2022 election, is four years. The successors to the offices elected at the 2020 and 2022 elections, respectively, serve for a term of four years.

Uniform Election Process

State election law, which generally governs all elections except municipal elections (other than in Baltimore City), requires that the electoral process for primary elections, general elections, and special elections be uniform, except where it would be inappropriate, or where exceptions are provided for in the law.

Voting/Tabulation Method

Generally, in elections governed by State election law, voters are able to choose in each race a number of candidates equal to the number of offices being filled in that race (*e.g.*, one candidate in a State Senate race and three candidates in some House of Delegates races), and the winners are nominated or elected based on which candidates receive the greatest number of votes.

State Fiscal Effect:

Fiscal 2026 Estimate

If a ranked-choice voting system is adopted in Howard County for board of education elections, beginning with the 2026 elections, general fund expenditures increase by approximately \$54,000 in fiscal 2026.

Costs Paid for by the State

This estimate assumes that the State pays only for its share (50%) of costs in certain categories of costs, which are traditionally shared by the State and counties, primarily voting equipment and paper ballots. Pursuant to Section 9-106 of the Election Law Article of the Maryland Code, the State shares costs of the statewide voting system with the counties, including the cost of printing ballots. Since a ranked-choice voting system would be limited to Howard County and implemented through action by the Howard County Council, this estimate assumes the remainder (and the majority) of the costs is paid for by the county (either directly or through billing by the State).

Future Year Estimates

Expenditures increase by varying amounts in future years. General fund expenditures increase by approximately \$55,000 in fiscal 2027, \$50,000 in fiscal 2028, and \$56,000 in fiscal 2029.

Local Fiscal Effect:

Fiscal 2026 Estimate

If a ranked-choice voting system is adopted in Howard County for board of education elections, beginning with the 2026 elections, Howard County expenditures increase by approximately \$839,000 in fiscal 2026. This estimate assumes costs are first incurred in fiscal 2026; however, a portion of those fiscal 2026 costs may instead be incurred in fiscal 2025, depending on the timing of the implementation of the ranked-choice voting system.

Costs Paid for by Howard County

As mentioned above, under State Fiscal Effect, this estimate assumes that certain costs are shared by the State and the county, but the majority of the costs are paid for by the county, either directly or through billing by the State. **Exhibit 1** provides more detail of those costs.

This estimate assumes that the initial ranked-choice voting system that is developed (if adopted) is not fully integrated into the State's existing election systems. Once ranked-choice voting results are tabulated through software independent from the State's voting system, those results are made public independently from other Howard County and statewide election results and are not reintroduced into the State's election systems to be aggregated and published with other results. Developing a fully integrated system results in greater overall costs.

Exhibit 1
Fiscal 2026 Howard County Expenditures

| <u>Cost Category</u> | <u>Ranked-choice</u> | <u>Description</u> |
|---|----------------------|--|
| Election Management System Programming | \$383,000 | Partial integration of ranked-choice voting system into SBE's election management system (including project management, planning, development, and testing). |
| Tabulation of Results | 42,000 | Cost of (1) dedicated laptops to run results tabulation software and (2) extensive testing of the software (the software itself is expected to be available at no cost). |
| Subject Matter Expert(s) | 101,000 | Personnel to assist the Howard County Board of Elections with implementation in fiscal 2026 (\$101,000 reflects half of the costs, with the other half incurred in fiscal 2027). |
| Other Contractual Services | 27,000 | Documentation, training, absentee ballot mailing, and other services. |
| Increased Specimen Ballot Costs | 5,000 | Increased length of specimen ballots for ranked-choice voting. |
| Voter Outreach | 210,000 | Direct mailing and/or other voter outreach methods. |
| Increased Paper Ballot Costs | 27,000 | Increased length of ballots for ranked-choice voting. |
| Additional Voting Equipment and Election Judges | 20,000 | An additional ballot scanner and election judge at high-volume polling places, to mitigate additional time added to the voting process by ranked-choice voting. |
| Election Staff and Training Video | 23,000 | Primarily additional local board of elections staff compensation and minimal cost of training videos for ranked-choice voting. |
| Total | \$839,000 | |

SBE: State Board of Elections

Future Year Estimates

Costs are incurred in future years but at a reduced overall level. Howard County expenditures increase by approximately \$405,000 in fiscal 2027, \$300,000 in fiscal 2028, and \$305,000 in fiscal 2029.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: SB 1129 (Howard County Senators) - Rules.

Information Source(s): Howard County; Maryland State Board of Elections; Department of Legislative Services

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