

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2024 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 1342
Ways and Means

(Delegate Feldmark)

Elections – Ballot Questions – Publication of Proposed Laws and Plain Language
Summary

This bill requires – for specified types of ballot questions – that the State Board of Elections (SBE) and each applicable local board of elections post in a manner widely accessible to the public for at least 65 days before the general election the complete text of the constitution, charter, amendment, or enactment that is being submitted to the voters. The bill also establishes that the condensed statement of purpose of a ballot question, that appears on the ballot, must be written in plain, easily understandable language. **The bill takes effect January 1, 2025.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill does not materially affect State finances.

Local Effect: The bill does not materially affect local government finances.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law:

Notice/Publication of Ballot Questions

A local board of elections must provide notice of each question to be submitted statewide and each question to be submitted to the voters of the county by (1) specimen ballot mailed at least one week before any early voting period before the general election or

(2) publication or dissemination by mass communication during the three weeks immediately preceding the general election at which a question will appear on the ballot. For a ballot question regarding an amendment to the Maryland Constitution or regarding an enactment of the General Assembly that has been petitioned to referendum, the notice must include both the ballot question and a brief statement, prepared in clear and concise language, devoid of technical and legal terms to the extent practicable, summarizing the question.

The complete text of a ballot question must be posted or available for public inspection in the office of SBE and each applicable local board of elections for 65 days prior to the general election. An individual may receive without charge a copy of the complete text of all constitutional amendments and questions from a local board, either in person, by mail, or electronically.

Text of Ballot Questions

Each ballot question must appear on the ballot containing (1) a question number or letter; (2) a brief designation of the type or source of the question; (3) a brief descriptive title in boldface type; (4) a condensed statement of the purpose of the question; and (5) the voting choices that the voter has.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See HB 177 of 2023.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Baltimore City; Caroline, Howard, and Prince George's counties; Maryland State Board of Elections; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 23, 2024
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