

Department of Fiscal Services
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 985 (Delegate Crumlin, et al.)
Commerce and Government Matters

Election Law - Election by Mail

This bill requires that all elections in Maryland be conducted by mail. A local elections board must mail an official ballot to each registered voter between the 14th and 20th day prior to the election. At the request of a registered voter, a replacement ballot may be obtained from the local elections board. In order to be counted, a ballot must be received by the board prior to 8 p.m. on election day. A ballot may also be counted if it was mailed before election day, has the verification date from a postal service agency affixed to the envelope, and was received by the board not later than 4 p.m. on the Wednesday following the election day. A local elections board may not open a ballot prior to 8 p.m. on election day.

The bill also requires the State Administrative Board of Election Laws (SABEL) to adopt the regulations to implement the mail-in voting system.

The bill is effective January 1, 1997.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures could increase by an indeterminate minimal amount beginning in FY 1998 as discussed below. Revenues would not be affected.

Local Effect: County and Baltimore City expenditures could be affected beginning in FY 1998 as discussed below. Revenues could potentially increase by an indeterminate, minimal amount as discussed below.

Fiscal Analysis

State Expenditures: General fund expenditures could increase due to the printing of new ballot forms to better conform with the mail-in voting system. It is expected that these costs would be less than \$10,000 and absorbable with the State Administrative Board of Election Laws' existing resources.

Local Effect: Beginning in fiscal 1998, county and Baltimore City expenditures could decrease by conducting mail-in elections due to lower personnel costs and polling place rental costs. These savings would, however, be partially offset by higher postage costs and ballot printing costs. The actual savings would depend upon the difference in cost between the existing election process and the mail-in election process. Information is not readily available to reliably estimate the savings at this time. However, the savings would be significant and vary by jurisdiction.

For instance, Baltimore City advises that it could save approximately \$250,000 per election by changing to a mail-in election process.

To the extent that existing optical scan voting systems could be utilized in counting the mail-in ballots, county expenditures for operating and maintaining this equipment would be continued. If a jurisdiction decides that fewer systems could count the ballots than under the existing election process, expenditures could decrease due to lower storage costs assuming the extra systems are sold in a secondary market. At this time, any such decrease cannot be determined.

It is expected that the lever voting machines would be made obsolete under a mail-in election process. Currently, there are seven jurisdictions with these types of machines. These jurisdictions are Baltimore City and Allegany, Calvert, Caroline, Dorchester, Prince George's, and Somerset counties. Under a mail-in election process, these jurisdictions would probably have to purchase or lease optical scan voting systems to count the ballots. Accordingly, expenditures could increase depending upon the type of voting system, the number of systems purchased or leased, and the financing and service contract arrangements. Although the expenditure increase cannot be determined beforehand, it would be significant.

Any revenue generated from the sale of extra machines or of obsolete machines in a secondary market cannot be reliably estimated at this time. It is expected, however, that the amount would be minimal.

Additional Comments: The State of Oregon has conducted many different elections

through mail-in ballots. The Office of Secretary of State (Elections and Public Records) estimates that the state saved approximately \$1 million in holding its two most recent elections, a special primary election and a special general election for a vacancy in the United States Senate. Additional information on Oregon's mail-in election experiences is not currently available.

Information Source(s): State Administrative Board of Election Laws; Allegany and Talbot counties; Baltimore City; State of Oregon (Office of Secretary of State); Department of Fiscal Services

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