

Department of Fiscal Services
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 818 (Delegate Morgan, *et al.*)
Commerce and Government Matters

The Initiative

This bill proposes a constitutional amendment to authorize the registered voters of the State to submit proposed legislation by petition (also known as an initiative) that would add to, repeal, or amend the public general laws or the State Constitution that were not approved at a regular or a special session of the General Assembly. A petition must contain signatures in an amount equal to at least 10% of the votes cast in the last general election for Governor. However, no more than one-half of the signatures may be voters in Baltimore City or a single county. The Secretary of State must certify that the petition contains the necessary number of signatures. The Governor must declare a proposal to be effective if at least 50% of the votes were cast in favor of a proposal to change the public general law or, in the case of a proposal to change the Constitution, at least two-thirds of the votes were cast in favor of it. A proposal is effective 30 days after the Governor's declaration.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential minimal general fund expenditure increase. No effect on revenues.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None. The bill would not directly affect small businesses.

Fiscal Analysis

State Expenditures: The Maryland Constitution requires that proposed amendments to the Constitution be publicized in at least two newspapers in each county, if available, and in at least three newspapers in Baltimore City once a week for four weeks immediately preceding a general election. The costs associated with these requirements are borne by the State. It is anticipated that the budget of the State Board of Elections for fiscal 1999 will contain

funding for publishing constitutional amendments for the 1998 general election.

SABEL advises that each petition could cost in excess of \$10,000 to cover postage and handling, verification processing, newspaper advertising, ballot placement, and ballot storage.

Assuming that there is a petition(s) in fiscal 1999, expenditures of the Office of the Secretary of State could increase by \$5,167 in fiscal 1999 due to the hiring of one contractual employee for a five-month period to certify the signatures on the petition. Beginning in fiscal 2000, the employee would work for a nine-month period. If there is a petition(s), out-year expenditures would range from \$8,927 in fiscal 2000 to \$9,473 in fiscal 2003 reflecting the salaries and benefits for the employee for a nine-month period.

Local Expenditures: If approved by the General Assembly, this constitutional amendment will be submitted to the voters at the 1998 general election. It should not require additional costs for the county election boards to administer the election.

Information Source(s): State Administrative Board of Election Laws, Office of the Secretary of State, Department of Fiscal Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 10, 1997
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