

Department of Fiscal Services
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 359 (Delegates Howard and Rosapepe)
Commerce and Government Matters

Elections - Mail-in Ballots - Removal of Eligibility Requirements

This bill changes the term “absentee ballot” to “mail-in ballot” and repeals the requirement that an affidavit be completed by a voter which states that the applicant meets certain eligibility requirements in order to vote by absentee ballot. Instead, the bill allows any registered voter to vote by mail-in ballot if the voter completes the necessary application. The State Administrative Board of Election Laws (SABEL) must prescribe all forms of applications for mail-in ballots.

The bill is effective July, 1, 1997.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. SABEL could prescribe the forms of applications with existing resources.

Local Effect: Indeterminate, but potentially significant effect on county expenditures. No effect on revenues.

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

Fiscal Analysis

Local Expenditures: There were approximately 2.6 million registered voters in Maryland for the November 1996 Presidential and Congressional election, of whom approximately 1.8 million actually voted in the election. There were also 69,300 absentee voters statewide. Under the bill, any registered voter may vote by mail-in ballot upon completion of the necessary application. To the extent that this leads to an increase in mail-in ballots, expenditures could increase due to additional postage, printing, and temporary personnel

costs. At this time, the actual expenditure increase cannot be reliably estimated, but it would vary by jurisdiction.

For illustrative purposes, Prince George's County has approximately 334,000 registered voters. Generally, the county has a voter turnout of approximately 50%. The county also has between 9,000 and 10,000 absentee voters. If Prince George's County had 30,000 mail-in voters, the county estimates that it would cost an additional \$121,700 per election. This estimate reflects postage, printing, equipment, and temporary personnel costs associated with 20,000 additional mail-in, or absentee, voters. Currently, the county spends approximately \$1 million per election.

At this time, the number of additional mail-in voters cannot be determined. However, if mail-in voters increase significantly, it is assumed that at some point a county would have to alter its existing precinct voting system to compensate for the increase. As a result, any additional costs associated with an increase in mail-in ballots could be at least partially offset by a savings due to a reduction in the scope of precinct elections. The amount of the offset would depend to a great extent on the size of the jurisdiction since larger jurisdictions tend to have a lower cost per voter in precinct elections than smaller jurisdictions.

Information Source(s): State Administrative Board of Election Laws, Prince George's County, Department of Fiscal Services

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Analysis by: Thomas Himler
Reviewed by: John Rixey

Direct Inquiries to:
John Rixey, Coordinating Analyst
(410) 841-3710
(301) 858-3710