

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 686 (Southern Maryland Delegation)

Commerce and Government Matters

Election Law - Accommodation of Blind and Visually Impaired Voters

This bill requires the State Board of Elections to adopt regulations that require local election boards to provide at least one voting station at each precinct that permits blind or visually impaired voters to cast their votes without assistance.

The bill is effective July 1, 1998.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The State Board of Elections could adopt regulations governing voting stations for blind or visually impaired voters with existing resources. Any costs associated with certifying voting systems could also be handled with existing resources.

Local Effect: Expenditures could increase significantly for local election boards depending upon the regulations adopted by the State Board of Elections and the type of voting system used by each local board. No effect on revenues. **This bill imposes a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: None.

Fiscal Analysis

Local Effect: The State Board of Elections advises that its regulations will require braille augmented machines to accommodate blind or visually impaired voters. The board further advises that as a result new voting machines would be needed in each precinct in the State, except for Baltimore City which currently has one braille voting machine in each precinct. The cost of replacing 1,464 existing machines, one for each precinct, for all 23 counties is estimated to be \$7.9 million. This estimate is based on 1,464 new machines at a cost of

\$5,455 dollars per machine.

The Department of Legislative Services advises, however, that existing machines could be augmented with braille overlays to accommodate blind or visually impaired voters, at far less cost than replacement of existing voting machines. A limited survey of county governments reveals the following: Calvert County advises that it could obtain braille overlays for its 15 precincts at a cost of \$1,500. Howard County estimates that it would cost \$17,000 to install braille overlays in its 85 precincts. Montgomery County advises that only 5% of the county's sight impaired voters are able to read braille, therefore an audio ballot system would be needed to accommodate these voters. The cost of such a system cannot be determined at this time, but would be substantial.

Information Source(s): State Board of Elections, Baltimore City, Calvert County, Howard County, Montgomery County, Department of Legislative Services

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