

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
1999 Session

FISCAL NOTE

Senate Bill 493 (Senator Jacobs. *et al.*)

Economic and Environmental Affairs

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Election Law - Ballot Questions - Plain English

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This bill requires each question that appears on a ballot to be written in “plain English.” The bill defines plain English as language that can be interpreted by a person who has no more than a ninth grade level of proficiency in English. The language used in a ballot question should be straightforward, avoid technical terms to the extent possible, and be easily readable. If it is not feasible to draft a ballot question in plain English, due to the technical nature of an issue, a summary using plain English is required to be made widely available to the public.

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** None. Requiring plain English to be used in ballot questions would not directly affect the State Board of Elections’ operations or finances.

**Local Effect:** Potential minimal. Printing and publishing expenses could increase if a summary is necessary to explain a technical ballot question.

**Small Business Effect:** Minimal.

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**Information Source(s):** Charles, Montgomery, Prince George's, and Somerset counties;  
State Board of Elections; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 23, 1999

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