

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2000 Session

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 473 (Delegate Zirkin)

Commerce and Government Matters

Elections - Removal of Qualifications for Absentee Voting

This bill allows any registered voter to vote by absentee ballot unless preempted under federal law.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Costs associated with the redesigning of computer-generated applications for absentee ballots used by the local boards could be handled with the existing resources of the State Board of Elections.

Local Effect: Expenditures would increase depending on the number of voters choosing to vote by absentee ballot. Increased costs would be for additional printing of the ballots, additional postage to send them out, and additional personnel necessary to manually count and record the results of the ballots. If absentee voters increase significantly, any additional costs associated with the increase could be partially offset by a savings due to a reduction in the scope of precinct elections.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: A registered voter may vote by absentee ballot if the individual will be absent from the polling county on election day or will be unable to attend the polling place on election day because of illness, physical disability, confinement in an institution, death or illness in the immediate family, academic requirements, or service to the State Board of Elections or a local board of elections. An application for an absentee ballot may be made on a form prepared for that purpose or in a written request.

Local Expenditures: The counties and Baltimore City bear most of the costs associated with absentee voting. The local boards take the calls requesting absentee ballots and mail ballots out to individuals who qualify to vote by mail. In addition, the local boards tally the absentee ballots, often the day after an election since there are so few absentee ballots relative to the number of voters who vote in person. If, following the enactment of this legislation, a significant portion of the population chooses to vote by absentee ballot, there would probably be a demand to have the ballots counted more quickly. This would necessitate the hiring and training of more part-time temporary employees, particularly in the more populated jurisdictions.

Although it is not possible to estimate the percentage of voters who would opt to vote by absentee ballot, it is assumed that the transition would be gradual. Therefore, the immediate impact may not be substantial, but the long-term impact could be significant, especially in counties with larger populations. However, if absentee voters increase significantly, counties would presumably alter their existing elections system to divert personnel from the polling districts and into tasks related to absentee ballot tallying. As a result, any additional costs associated with an increase in absentee ballots could be partially offset by the savings resulting from a reduction in the scope of precinct elections.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 336 of 1999 would have allowed any Prince George's County resident to vote by absentee ballot. It received an unfavorable report from the House Commerce and Government Matters Committee.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): State Board of Elections, Baltimore City, Caroline County, Howard County, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, Department of Legislative Services

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