

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2000 Session

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 487 (Delegate K. Kelly. *et al.*)

Ways and Means

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**Allegany, Garrett, and Washington Counties - Interactive Teleconference Sites -  
Pilot Program**

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This bill establishes a pilot program to build interactive teleconference sites in Allegany, Garrett, and Washington counties. Local boards of education in these counties must develop a plan to build an interactive teleconference site and submit it to the State Superintendent of Schools for approval. The State Superintendent must award grants to the counties to build interactive teleconference sites and the Governor must include funds in the State budget for the grants.

This bill takes effect July 1, 2000.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** General fund expenditures could increase by \$53,800 annually beginning in FY 2002, assuming the State covers the entire cost of the pilot program. Revenues would not be affected.

**Local Effect:** Local school expenditures in Allegany, Garrett, and Washington counties would increase by \$53,800 annually beginning in FY 2002 due to the monthly service charge for the teleconferencing sites; however, State grants authorized under the pilot program would offset the local costs.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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## Analysis

**Bill Summary:** This bill establishes a pilot program to build interactive teleconference sites in Allegany, Garrett, and Washington counties for the purpose of (1) facilitating teacher participation from the three counties in educational seminars, briefings, meetings, and conferences held by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), the State board, and other education organizations; (2) providing a useful educational medium for students; (3) reducing travel costs; (4) encouraging teachers to participate in seminars and conferences; (5) promoting the efficient use of faculty time; and (6) eliminating weather, traffic, and safety concerns implicit in long distance travel.

Local boards of education in Allegany, Garrett, and Washington counties must develop a plan to build an interactive teleconference site and submit the plan to the State Superintendent of Schools for approval. The State Superintendent must award grants to the counties to build interactive teleconference sites. Beginning in fiscal 2002, the Governor must include funds in the State budget for the grants.

**Current Law:** Maryland public schools can participate in the Maryland Distance Learning Network which provides interactive teleconferencing services for up to four locations simultaneously.

**Background:** The State, in partnership with Bell Atlantic, has developed the Maryland Distance Learning Network (MDLN) which expands the educational and training opportunities for individuals beyond the traditional boundaries of a single campus or school. The network provides live full-motion interactive video transmission to colleges, schools, and other educational institutions in Maryland. The network uses fiber-optic technology to deliver images and sound among participating locations. Up to four classrooms across the State can be linked together and participate in a live, interactive session.

The purpose of the network is to improve student's access to educational and training opportunities and to encourage economic development. All public and independent universities, colleges, high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools are eligible to participate in the network. Non-profit organizations may be certified by the Maryland Higher Education Commission or the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to receive free classroom equipment from Bell Atlantic. Both Allegany and Garrett counties have Bell Atlantic teleconferencing sites; the sites in Allegany County are located at Flintstone, Mount Savage, and Oldtown schools and the site in Garrett County is located at the community college. In addition, there are another 15 teleconferencing sites installed by Bell Atlantic in the State.

**State and Local Fiscal Effect:** An existing service is currently being provided by Bell

Atlantic through the MDLN. Public schools are eligible for free teleconferencing equipment and installation from Bell Atlantic. The estimated cost for equipment and installation at each site is \$50,000. Bell Atlantic does charge a monthly service fee of \$1,495 per site (\$17,940 annually); however, there are no long distance service charges. Establishing an interactive teleconferencing site in each county that uses the Bell Atlantic equipment would cost \$53,820 annually which reflects the monthly service fee. It is assumed that the State grants authorized under the pilot program would pay for these services. However, if the interactive teleconferencing sites are not part of the MDLN, State costs would increase by an additional \$150,000 in the first year.

MSDE advises that one education specialist at a cost of \$40,800 would be needed to provide technical assistance for the pilot program. The Department of Legislative Services advises that an additional position is not warranted and that technical assistance can be provided through existing State resources and by Bell Atlantic.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland State Department of Education, Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 21, 2000

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