

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2001 Session

FISCAL NOTE

Senate Bill 411 (Senator Harris, *et al.*)
Economic and Environmental Affairs

**Election Law - Election Day - Voter's Name Missing from Registration Records -
Voting Allowed Pending Verification of Voter's Eligibility**

This bill establishes a procedure for allowing a voter whose name is missing from the voter registry to obtain a temporary registration and vote by absentee ballot. Local election boards are required to make a final determination of the voter's qualifications within ten days of an election. The absentee ballot of a voter who is later found to be qualified will be counted in the official canvass.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The State Board of Elections could handle the bill's requirements with existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: Local election boards could incur additional and potentially significant expenditures associated with the number of absentee ballots that would have to be processed at polling places on election day. **This bill may impose a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: There are no provisions in the Election Code that allow a voter to vote if that voter's registration status cannot be conclusively determined on election day. Absentee ballots are currently not issued to voters at polling places.

Background: The State Board of Elections advises that currently there are a significant number of persons on election day who come to polling places believing they are registered when they are not. Several factors contribute to this, and the majority of these people are voters who have recently had their addresses changed with the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA). The MVA automatically sends change of address information to the local election boards, which remove these voters from their registries. The MVA does not send new address information to local boards however. Voters are responsible for applying to register in their new voting district. The MVA also provides applications for new voter registration, and while many voters fill out this application, in some cases the actual voter registration form is not subsequently submitted. Also, the MVA allows drivers to change their address over the phone and via the Internet. Neither of these methods gives voters an opportunity to fill out applications to register at their new addresses.

State Fiscal Effect: The State Board of Elections advises that it would need to adopt additional regulations and develop a training guide for election judges relating to implementation of the bill's provisions. This could be handled within existing resources.

Local Fiscal Effect: The State Board of Elections estimates that the number of unregistered voters at polling places on election day will only increase given the trends mentioned in the Background section of this fiscal note. Some counties surveyed state that their expenditures would increase under the bill's provisions because they would have to accommodate a significant amount of unregistered voters by issuing provisional absentee ballots at the polling place on election day. Additional costs will vary among counties depending on the size of the voting population. These costs would include expenditures for additional election judges at polling places, additional staff or overtime for canvassing of an increased number of absentee ballots, postage expenses, and administrative costs for determining voter eligibility after an election. Montgomery County estimates that expenditures would exceed \$410,000 per election. Frederick County advises that the cost of additional election judges alone would exceed \$11,000 per election.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): State Board of Elections; Baltimore City; Frederick, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties; Department of Legislative Services

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