

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
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FISCAL NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 372 (Senator Conway, *et al.*)

Economic and Environmental Affairs

Ways and Means

Education - Technology for Education Program - Nonvisual Access

This bill requires the State Superintendent of Schools and the Secretary of Business and Economic Development to jointly ensure that invitations for bids, requests for proposals or grants, and procurement contracts for computer-based classroom instructional technology include a clause governing nonvisual access. The clause must specify that instructional computer hardware and software that is to be used by visually impaired individuals must provide equivalent access for effective use by both visual and nonvisual means. If technology meeting nonvisual access standards is not available, the State or a local school system must select technology with the greatest access capability and implement an alternative method of instruction that enables a visually impaired student to achieve instructional outcomes consistent with the student's individualized education plan. The State Board of Education must adopt regulations that require computer-based classroom instructional technology purchased by the State or a local school system to comply with the nonvisual access requirements established in the bill.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The State Superintendent of Schools and the Secretary of Business and Economic Development could ensure that invitations for bids, requests for proposals or grants, and procurement contracts contain the nonvisual access clause with existing resources.

Local Effect: Local school expenditures for instructional computer hardware and software could increase.

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law: Invitations for bids, requests for proposals or grants, and procurement contracts for computer-based instructional technology are not required to include a clause requiring nonvisual access. Local school systems and the State are not required to purchase computer hardware and software that meets nonvisual access standards.

Background: According to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), approximately 800 public school students in Maryland are legally blind. Computer-based nonvisual access technologies include computer screen readers, non-pointing computer navigation devices, and verbal tags for web-based graphics.

Local school systems spent almost \$30 million in local funds on computer hardware (\$24 million) and software (\$5.4 million) in fiscal 2000. Estimated local expenditures for hardware and software in fiscal 2001 total approximately \$40 million.

State Fiscal Effect: In fiscal 2000 the State spent \$7.3 million on computer hardware and \$180,000 on computer software for 173 public schools through the Technology in Maryland Schools Program. In fiscal 2001, 329 schools are in the program, and MSDE is spending \$13.8 million on hardware and \$340,000 on software. The bill does not mandate that the State increase its spending for classroom technology equipment.

The State Superintendent of Schools and the Secretary of Business and Economic Development could ensure that invitations for bids, requests for proposals or grants, and procurement contracts contain the required nonvisual access clause with existing resources.

Local Expenditures: Although the exact costs cannot be reliably estimated at this time, it is expected that computer hardware and software expenses would increase if technology contracts and purchases must meet nonvisual access standards.

However, the bill only requires that hardware and software that will be used by blind or visually impaired individuals must provide nonvisual access. Less than one in one thousand public school students in Maryland are blind, and therefore the overall impact on local school expenditures would not be significant.

Small Business Effect: Small technology businesses could lose Maryland school systems as customers if they are unable or unwilling to provide products with the nonvisual access capabilities required under the bill. Small businesses that specialize in nonvisual access technologies or provide technology products with the necessary capabilities could benefit.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 358 (Delegate Hixson) – Ways and Means.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Department of Education, Department of Business and Economic Development, Department of Legislative Services

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