

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2001 Session

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 358 (Delegate Hixson)
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 any contract or grant for technology that is to be developed or obtained for classroom usage includes a clause governing nonvisual access. The clause must specify that the technology must provide equivalent access for effective use by both visual and nonvisual means and be compatible with peripheral hardware and software used for nonvisual access. The State Board of Education must adopt regulations that require technology purchased or used by the State or by a local school system for classroom instruction to comply with the 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 contracts and grants contain the nonvisual access clause with existing resources.

Local Effect: The additional costs associated with purchasing all classroom technology with nonvisual access capabilities and the costs associated with replacing existing technology equipment that is not compatible with nonvisual access equipment would be significant. *This bill imposes a mandate on a unit of local government.*

Small Business Effect: Potential meaningful.

Analysis

Current Law: Technology contracts and grants are not required to include a clause requiring nonvisual access for technology used by the State or a local school system for classroom instruction.

Background: According to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), approximately 800 public school students in Maryland are legally blind. Nonvisual access technologies include computer screen readers, non-pointing computer navigation devices, verbal tags for web-based graphics, and multimedia products with a second audio track describing the visual elements and actions.

Local school systems spent more than \$30 million in local funds on computer hardware (\$24 million), computer software (\$5.4 million), and instructional TV and distance learning equipment (\$1.9 million) in fiscal 2000. Estimated local expenditures for these items in fiscal 2001 total more than \$40 million.

State Fiscal Effect: In fiscal 2000 MSDE 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 this contribution.

The State Superintendent of Schools and the Secretary of Business and Economic Development could ensure that contracts and grants 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 technology expenses could increase significantly if all technology contracts and purchases must meet nonvisual access standards.

It is also assumed that a portion of the existing technology equipment used for classroom instruction would require replacement or “retro-fitting” in order to utilize nonvisual access features. The costs associated with replacement and retro-fitting could 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: SB 372 (Senator Conway, *et al.*) – Economic and Environmental Affairs.

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

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