

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2004 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 538
Finance

(Senator Giannetti)

Legislative Data Processing Advisory Committee – Live Broadcast of House and Senate Floor Sessions

This bill requires the Legislative Data Processing Advisory Committee to develop a plan to implement a live webcam Internet broadcast of both Senate and House floor sessions to be offered to the public free of charge. The committee must study plans in other states that provide this service. The plan must be developed prior to the start of the 2006 legislation session.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Developing the regional plan could be handled within the existing resources of the Department of Legislative Services (DLS). Implementing a plan could require significant expenditures, depending upon the plan developed.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: There are no provisions in State law regarding audio and video recording of floor sessions of the Maryland General Assembly.

Background: Since the early 1990s, the Senate has been making audio recordings of floor sessions and committee meetings. The House of Delegates began making audio recordings of floor proceedings during the 2000 session. Since the 2001 session,

Maryland Public Television (MPT) has videotaped floor sessions and more recently, selected committee hearings. Six to seven personnel and three to four cameras are required to videotape a floor session or committee hearing. MPT broadcasts these recordings on its local public television channels; however, these tapings are limited to two-hour segments in most cases and are not distributed to the public via the Internet

The cost of video coverage can be separated into production costs, which include the cost of camera equipment and personnel and video distribution costs, which includes the hardware and software required to distribute or broadcast video live on the Internet. In 2000, information provided by states that videotape floor and/or committee meetings revealed that initial capitalization costs could range from \$2 to \$4 million for construction, installation, and cabling for video cameras for two chambers, 10 to 12 committee rooms, and remote consoles for monitoring those cameras. Most states reported using five to six cameras in each chamber for floor sessions and three cameras in each committee room. Although this bill only contemplates videotaping of floor sessions, the experience of other states have found that because the initial equipment investment to televise floor proceedings is so high, the marginal costs of taping other events such as committee hearings is relatively low.

Current costs for distributing live video broadcasts on the Internet most likely have declined since 2000 as the cost of the requisite hardware and software decreases with advances in the technology. More recent estimates put the initial start-up cost for video distribution at \$131,700 for the first year and \$58,000 in out-years. This estimate does not include production, personnel, and video recording equipment costs, which would increase initial and ongoing expenditures significantly, although it is anticipated that total costs could be lower than the 2000 estimate.

Additional Comments: Fourteen states offer live video of floor sessions on the Internet, of these, five provide archived recordings. Fourteen states offer live audio of floor sessions on the Internet. The Wisconsin and Illinois legislatures offer live audio for its senate and video for the house.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 90 was introduced during the 2000 session and would have required DLS to produce an audio and video recording of floor sessions. The bill received an unfavorable report from the House Rules and Executive Nominations Committee.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Legislative Services

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