

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2005 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 622
Ways and Means

(Delegate Petzold, *et al.*)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Elections - Absentee Voting on Demand

This bill repeals the eligibility requirements for absentee voting and allows any individual to vote using an absentee ballot unless prohibited by federal law.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Costs associated with the redesigning of computer-generated applications for absentee ballots used by the local boards could be handled with the existing resources of the State Board of Elections.

Local Effect: Expenditures would increase, depending on the number of voters choosing to vote by absentee ballot, for additional ballots, postage, and personnel. If absentee voters increase significantly, any additional costs associated with the increase could be partially offset by a savings due to a reduction in the scope of precinct elections.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: In general, a registered voter may vote by absentee ballot at an election if the voter:

- may be absent on election day from the county in which the voter is registered;
- because of accident, illness, or physical disability, will be unable to go to the polling place on election day;

- because of confinement in or restriction to an institution, will be prevented from going to the polling place on election day;
- because of a death or serious illness in the voter's immediate family, will be unable to go to the polling place on election day;
- is a full-time student at an institution of higher education located outside the voter's precinct but within the county of registration, and academic requirements prevent the voter from going to the polling place on election day; or
- because of employment by or service as an official of the State Board of Elections or a local board, is required to be absent from the precinct in which the voter is registered to vote on election day.

Title III of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 mandates all states to require identification from voters who have registered by mail and who have not previously voted in an election for federal office in a state, or if the individual has not previously voted in such an election in a local jurisdiction that is located in a state without a central, computerized voter registration list.

Background: In recent years, more states have been allowing voters to cast absentee ballots without providing a reason. According to the nonprofit, nonpartisan Election Reform Information Project, during the 2004 general election 25 states allowed no-excuse voting for all registered voters and several states allow voters to register as permanent absentee voters.

Local Fiscal Effect: Although it is not possible to estimate the percentage of voters who would opt to vote by absentee ballot, it is assumed that the transition would be gradual. Any substantial increase in the number of voters requesting absentee ballots under the bill would increase expenditures for additional postage and printing, especially in larger jurisdictions. Large volume increases could require additional temporary staff to process absentee ballots during an election. However, if absentee voters increase significantly, counties would presumably alter their existing election systems to divert personnel from the polling districts and into tasks related to absentee ballot tallying. As a result, any additional costs associated with an increase in absentee ballots could be partially offset by the savings resulting from a reduction in the scope of precinct elections.

Additional Comments: In the 2004 general election, absentee voters comprised approximately 6% of the total voting population.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 473 of 2000, an identical bill, was unfavorably reported from the House Commerce and Government Matters Committee.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Baltimore City, Montgomery County, Maryland State Board of Elections, Department of Legislative Services

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ncs/jr

Analysis by: Michelle L. Harrison-Davis

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510