

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2005 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 432 (Senators Jacobs and Harris)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Election Law - Boater Voter

This bill designates the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) or any other person designated by DNR to issue a fishing or hunting license as a voter registration agency.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill's requirements could be handled with the existing resources of the State Board of Elections and DNR.

Local Effect: Potential impact on local board expenditures for overseeing voter registration agencies.

Small Business Effect: The bill's provisions could substantially impact the operations of small businesses who are licensed agents of DNR.

Analysis

Current Law: DNR may authorize any person engaged in a retail business to sell, on a consignment basis, hunting and fishing licenses to individuals.

The State board shall designate the following offices as voter registration agencies:

- all offices in the State that provide public assistance;
- all offices in the State that provide State-funded programs primarily engaged in providing services to individuals with disabilities; and

- all public institutions of higher education in the State.

Each voter registration agency is required to distribute a voter registration application approved by the State board or the Federal Election Commission with each application for service or assistance it renders and with each recertification, renewal, or change of address form relating to such service or assistance. It must provide a document to prospective registrants that includes a question offering the applicant an opportunity to register to vote if they are not registered and an offer of assistance should the applicant need help completing the voter registration form. The document must also include the address and toll free telephone number of the State Board of Elections.

The voter registration agency must provide each applicant who does not decline to register to vote and who accepts assistance the same degree of assistance with regard to completion of the registration application as is provided by the office with regard to the completion of its own applications, unless the applicant refuses such assistance, and accept the completed voter registration application for transmittal to the appropriate election board.

Background: DNR currently licenses over 370 sports license agents who are compensated by a commission on each hunting or fishing license sold. Licensed agents include large retail chains such as Walmart and Dick's Sporting Goods, but small shops and hunting supply stores make up the vast majority of licensed agents. DNR policy ensures that agents are fairly evenly distributed throughout the State. The Western Maryland and Eastern Shore regions rely almost exclusively on smaller retail agents.

State Fiscal Effect: DNR advises that its seven regional centers would be impacted by an increased workload due to increased contact between the centers and licensed agents for purposes of distribution and collection of completed registrations. The agency also advised that implementation of the program would require installation of a new computer system for electronic registration at a cost of \$100,000.

The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) disagrees with DNR's estimate because the bill's provisions only require DNR's regional service centers to supply voter registration forms and assistance to individuals who request help in completing the form. Local boards of election supply voter registration forms to voter registration agencies and must keep track of agencies for restocking the forms. Voter registration agencies could incur postage costs if they choose to mail forms to the State board. However, applicants are free to mail in their application themselves. DLS anticipates that the regional service centers could handle the bill's requirements with existing resources.

Local Fiscal Effect: Currently, there are approximately 300 voter registration agencies located around the State. The bill would more than double this number. Local boards of election would be responsible for tracking the additional voter registration agencies created under the bill, providing voter registration applications, and display holders for the applications. The large number of agents designated by DNR could substantially increase local board's duties and could result in increased expenditures for personnel to oversee the agencies depending on the number of additional agencies in a jurisdiction.

Small Business Effect: This bill requires several hundred retail shops and businesses to maintain and distribute voter registration applications, assists individuals in their completion, as well as forward completed applications to the State board within five days. These requirements would be particularly burdensome on the vast majority of small businesses that are licensed sports agents in the State. Many of the retail shops involved have limited counter space for voter registration materials and inadequate staff to assist individuals with completing the form. While these agents are paid a commission on each hunting and fishing license sold, they would not be compensated for administering voter registration applications. In addition, these businesses must pay the postage costs of mailing completed forms to the appropriate election board within the statutory time limit.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Board of Elections, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Legislative Services

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mp/jr

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