

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2005 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 906
Economic Matters

(Washington County Delegation)

Education, Health, and Environmental
Affairs

Washington County - Alarm Systems

This bill authorizes the Washington County Board of County Commissioners to adopt regulations governing alarm systems in the county.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None.

Local Effect: Potential increase in Washington County revenues from registering alarm systems in the county. Any costs incurred from monitoring alarm systems in the county would be covered by revenues generated from the registration fees.

Small Business Effect: Potential minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: This bill authorizes the Washington County Commissioners to adopt regulations:

- registering alarm system contractors operating in the county;
- registering alarm users in the county;
- providing penalties for alarm contractors and users who fail to register with the county;
- providing civil citations and penalties for false alarms;

- providing exemptions from civil citations and penalties for false alarms;
- authorizing the designated county enforcement agency to maintain a record of the alarm system contractor, monitoring service, and manufacturer of each security system operating in the county;
- authorizing the designated enforcement agency to inform the manufacturer or installer of the alarm system and the appropriate State or national licensing agency or the certification standards entity if the agency finds a pattern of false alarms attributed to a particular model or installation by a particular contractor; and
- establishing fees for registering an alarm system contractor or user.

Additionally, the county commissioners are required to submit a report to the Washington County Delegation on December 31, 2006, documenting the number of alarm users in the county, the number of false alarms reported between December 1, 2005 through November 30, 2006, as well as the number of civil citations issued in Washington County for false alarms during this time period.

Furthermore, if Washington County adopts regulations regarding the registration of alarm contractors and users, as well as for the issuance of civil citations and penalties for a violation, Washington County is exempt from the section of law dealing with multiple false alarms.

Current Law: Washington County does not have the authority to regulate alarm systems.

If the number of false alarms to which a law enforcement unit or fire department responds to exceeds three within a 30-day period or eight within a 12-month period for a particular location, except for those alarms triggered by weather conditions or causes beyond the control of the alarm user, the responding unit or department may issue a civil citation. A civil citation carries a penalty of \$30 for each negligent or accidental activation or false alarm. If an individual intentionally activates a signal for a nonemergency situation, the individual is guilty of a misdemeanor and is subject to imprisonment of up to 90 days, a fine of up to \$500, or both.

Background: In 2004, the Washington County Sheriff's Department responded to 3,008 alarm activations – 8 were valid calls.

Chapter 401 of 1998 and Chapter 438 of 2000, both similar to this bill, authorized the Frederick County Commissioners and the Calvert County Commissioners, respectively, to adopt regulations governing alarm systems in the county.

Local Fiscal Effect: While authorizing the county commissioners to adopt regulations governing alarm systems in the county would not directly impact county finances, there could be a fiscal impact with the regulations that the county adopts. Washington County revenues from fees for registering alarm system contractors and users could increase, while monitoring compliance with the regulations might require additional resources. The total fiscal impact, however, cannot be reliably quantified as it would depend on what fees are adopted for registering alarm system contractors and users, as well as what regulations are adopted to govern alarm systems. In any event, Washington County advises that any costs incurred as a result of this authority would be covered by the revenues generated from the fees.

Small Business Effect: While small businesses would not be directly impacted by merely authorizing the county commissioners to adopt regulations governing alarm systems, small businesses in Washington County could be affected by the regulations adopted.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Washington County, Department of State Police, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 11, 2005
n/hlb

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