

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2006 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 857  
Ways and Means

(Delegate Ross, *et al.*)

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Election Law - Polling Places on College Campuses

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This bill provides for separate precincts to be set up at public or private higher education institutions that have 500 or more students, faculty, and staff who are registered to vote in the precinct that includes the institution. If the institution receives State funds, the polling facility must be provided at no charge to the local board and the institution must assist the local board in recruiting election judges.

The bill takes effect June 1, 2006.

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** General fund expenditures would increase to pay for half of the cost of additional voting machines needed at higher education institution polling places and possibly additional costs associated with the machines. Counties would pay the other half of these costs. The State would pay at least \$4,000 (representing half the cost of three voting machines) per polling place. It cannot be estimated at this time how many additional polling places would be needed.

**Local Effect:** Expenditures would increase to bear half the cost of additional voting machines needed at higher education institution polling places and possibly additional costs associated with the machines, as well as the full amount of additional costs for election judge personnel, voter notification, and other expenses. Costs per polling place would be at least \$4,000 representing half the cost of three voting machines and between \$3,000 and \$6,000 for additional expenses (excluding possible costs associated with the voting machines). It cannot be estimated at this time how many additional polling places would be needed. **This bill imposes a mandate on a unit of local government.**

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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## Analysis

### Current Law:

#### *Creation or Alteration of Precincts*

A local board may create and alter precinct boundaries, designate polling place locations in any election district, ward, or precinct in the county, and combine or abolish precincts. A local board may not create or change a precinct boundary or polling place during the period beginning the Tuesday, 13 weeks prior to a primary election, through the day of the general election. The board must adopt a written resolution to create a new precinct or change a precinct boundary stating the purpose of the change, containing a written description of precinct boundaries, and accompanied by a map of the area involved. The resolution must be filed with the State Board of Elections (SBE) within five days of its adoption. Voters affected by the change must be notified by mail at least 30 days after the change.

#### *Polling Places*

Polling places are designated by local boards according to statutory guidelines, including that polling places be located as conveniently as practicable for the majority of registered voters assigned to that polling place. A public official responsible for a building requested by a local board for an election must make the space available at no charge.

#### *Election Funding*

Chapter 564 of 2001, which required SBE to select, certify, and acquire a uniform statewide voting system for both polling places and absentee voting, provides, in uncodified language, that each county must pay its share, based on its voting age population, of one-half of the State's cost of acquiring and operating the uniform statewide voting systems. Operating costs include the cost of maintenance, storage, printing of ballots, technical support and programming, related supplies and materials, and software licensing fees.

Under codified State law, in existence prior to the enactment of Chapter 564 of 2001, counties are required to appropriate funds for the local boards' overall operational expenses and expenses for supplies and equipment necessary for voter registration and elections.

**Background:** There are 61 higher education institutions in Maryland. It is unknown how many of these institutions would be eligible for a separate polling precinct, having 500 students, faculty, or staff registered to vote in the precinct that includes the institution.

**State Fiscal Effect:** General fund expenditures would increase due to the cost of additional voting machines at higher education institution polling places. Presumably, pursuant to Chapter 564 of 2001, the State would be responsible for one-half of the cost of any additional voting machines needed for separate polling places set up at higher education institutions. A polling place would require three voting machines which would cost roughly \$8,000, half of which the State would be responsible for. It cannot be estimated at this time how many additional polling places would be needed. The State would also bear half of possible additional costs associated with the voting machines for technical support, software installation, maintenance, and storage.

**Local Fiscal Effect:** Local expenditures would increase due to the cost of establishing new polling places at higher education institutions. According to several local election boards, a polling place would require three voting machines which would cost roughly \$8,000, half of which counties would be responsible for. Additional costs for election judges and training personnel, notification of voters, delivery costs, and supplies would likely vary based on the compensation level of election judges and training personnel in each county as well as the number of expected voters at each new polling place, affecting notification costs and possibly the number of election judges needed. For illustrative purposes, Montgomery and Harford counties provided rough estimates of between \$3,000 and \$6,000 for these additional costs at each polling place.

Counties would also bear half of possible additional costs associated with the voting machines for technical support, software installation, maintenance, and storage. SBE estimates the cost of creating and running a polling place (presumably including the cost of voting machines) to be between \$30,000 and \$50,000, which may include these additional costs.

Election judge compensation is statutorily specified for some counties. Otherwise, local boards are authorized to fix the compensation of election judges within limits authorized by the county's governing body.

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## **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Washington County, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, Kent County, Worcester County, Maryland State Board of Elections, Department of Legislative Services

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