

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2007 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**

Senate Bill 786 (Senator Harris, *et al.*)  
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

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**Election Law - Absentee Ballots - Mailing Deadlines**

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This bill requires local election boards, beginning five weeks before election day, to send absentee ballots to voters within seven days of receiving an absentee ballot application. If an absentee ballot application is received before the Tuesday before the election, the corresponding absentee ballot must be mailed on or before the fifth day before the election. For any applications received on or before the day five weeks before election day, corresponding absentee ballots must be sent out on or before the day four weeks before election day.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2007.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** General fund expenditures could increase in FY 2008, FY 2011, and FY 2012 to meet the absentee ballot mailing deadlines for certain elections. Any such costs should not be significant and could possibly be handled within existing resources.

**Local Effect:** Local government expenditures could increase in election years due to staffing and computer equipment costs to meet absentee ballot mailing deadlines.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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## Analysis

**Current Law:** An application for an absentee ballot generally must be received no later than the Tuesday preceding an election though late applications can be made in person at the office of a voter's local board through the close of polls on election day.

Upon receipt of an application, if an applicant qualifies to vote by absentee ballot, a local board must send the ballot as soon as practicable after receipt of the request. If the absentee ballots have not been received from the printer, the ballots must be sent as soon as practicable after the local board receives the ballots.

**Background:** An unusually large number of absentee ballot applications were received by Maryland local election boards prior to the 2006 general election, putting a strain on local boards to meet the demand for absentee ballots. As a result, some voters did not receive absentee ballots in time to meet the November 6 ("before election day") mailing deadline.

**State Fiscal Effect:** General fund expenditures could increase in fiscal 2008, 2011, and 2012 due to the cost of additional staffing that could be needed to attempt to meet the mailing deadlines set out under the bill prior to Baltimore City and gubernatorial general elections and possibly the presidential primary election. SBE advises there would not be much time prior to these elections to finalize the layout and content of ballots and then have the ballots go through proofreading by local election boards, public review, and printing in time to meet the mailing requirements of the bill. The mailing deadlines could potentially be met, though SBE advises it could require additional staff to speed up the ballot finalizing and printing process. Legislative Services advises these costs should not be significant and could possibly be handled within existing resources.

**Local Fiscal Effect:** Local government expenditures could increase in election years due to staffing and potentially computer equipment costs for some local boards to meet the requirement that absentee ballots be sent out five days prior to an election for applications received prior to the Tuesday before an election. Any increase would be due to the short period (two days) in which local election boards would have to turn around the applications and the potentially high volume of applications that could be received just prior to the absentee ballot application deadline (Tuesday prior to an election). Additional staff may be required and additional computer equipment may be needed for the staff to access the statewide voter registration system. The extent of any expenditure increase cannot be reliably estimated at this time.

Local election boards advise that the boards' ability to meet the deadlines set out in the bill would also be contingent on when ballots were received and ready to be mailed out.

Additional staff resources are not expected to be able to shorten the time it takes to finalize, proofread, review, and print the absentee ballots in order to meet the earlier deadlines required by the bill (around the time of 3 to 4 weeks before an election) prior to the Baltimore City and gubernatorial general elections and possibly the presidential primary election (see State Fiscal Effect).

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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, Baltimore City, State Board of Elections, Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - March 21, 2007  
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