

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2008 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 508 (Delegate Cane, *et al.*)
 Environmental Matters

Natural Resources - Virtual Environmental Science Center

This bill establishes an Internet-based Virtual Environmental Science Center to foster minority participation in the environmental community. The center, which would be managed by an executive director, must be a cooperative effort by existing or future environmental centers at specified educational institutions and minority communities in the State. To the extent practicable, the center must use existing facilities and personnel within those centers to carry out the recommendations of the Task Force on Minority Participation in the Environmental Community. The stated intent of the bill is that the center be funded by a minority environmental and land trust.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Because a minority environmental and land trust does not exist, it is assumed that general fund expenditures would increase by \$247,400 in FY 2009 to establish the center. Future year estimates are annualized and adjusted for inflation. No effect on revenues.

(in dollars)	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	247,400	232,900	242,800	253,200	264,200
Net Effect	(\$247,400)	(\$232,900)	(\$242,800)	(\$253,200)	(\$264,200)

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate effect

Local Effect: Although local jurisdictions could benefit from opportunities provided by the center, the bill would not have a significant impact on local operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Minimal overall impact, although the center could have a positive impact on minority/environmental businesses.

Analysis

Current Law/Background: Chapter 520 of 2006 established the Task Force on the Minority Participation in the Environmental Community to evaluate and make recommendations regarding methods of improving minority participation in the environmental community. In its November 2007 final report to the Governor and the General Assembly, the task force recommended that a Minority Environmental and Land Trust be established to serve as a vehicle to implement and finance the task force's programmatic recommendations, including the establishment of a virtual environmental center to facilitate minority education and participation. Although a Minority Environmental and Land Trust does not exist under current law, legislation to establish such a trust has been introduced as SB 100 of 2008.

Other key recommendations of the task force include creating cultural, historical, and environmental teaching activities; strengthening and promoting educational programs; establishing a dialogue between the minority communities and traditional environmental conservationists; establishing linkages with the community via liaisons at State agencies; and improving professional development opportunities. The bill is a direct result of the task force's recommendations.

State Expenditures: The stated intent of the bill is that the center be funded by a minority environmental and land trust. Although legislation has been introduced to establish a Minority Environmental and Land Trust, such a trust does not exist under current law. Accordingly, in the absence of such a trust, it is assumed that the costs associated with the establishment of the center would be borne by the general fund.

General fund expenditures could increase by an estimated \$247,385 in fiscal 2009, which accounts for the bill's October 1, 2008 effective date. This estimate reflects the cost of hiring one administrator to serve as the executive director, one programmer analyst to provide computer support, and one administrative aide to provide general administrative support. It includes salaries, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses, including contractual services for a webmaster, software maintenance, advertising, printing, outreach, and business plan development.

Positions	3
Salaries and Fringe Benefits	\$140,574
Contractual Services	50,500
Computer Equipment/Furniture	37,968
Other Equipment/Operating Expenses	<u>18,343</u>
Total FY 2009 State Expenditures	\$247,385

Future year expenditures reflect: • full salaries with 4.4% annual increases and 3% employee turnover; • 2% annual increases in ongoing operating expenses; and • ongoing contractual services (\$26,500 annually) for webmaster services, advertising, software maintenance, printing, and outreach activities.

Legislative Services advises that the bill is silent as to where the center would be housed. Based on information provided by the University of Maryland Eastern Shore and the Department of Natural Resources, it is assumed that it would be housed at UMES, which has an existing environmental center. Based on information provided by DNR and the Maryland Independent College and University Association, other environmental centers exist at Morgan State University, Washington College, and Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health.

It is assumed that once the center is established, environmental centers at the various institutions specified in the bill would use existing personnel and facilities to implement the task force recommendations to the extent possible.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: SB 99 (Senator Gladden) - Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs.

Information Source(s): Department of Natural Resources, University System of Maryland, Morgan State University, Maryland Independent College and University Association, Maryland Higher Education Commission, Department of Legislative Services

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