

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2008 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 439 (Senator Jones)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Election Law - Polling Place Designation - Senior Centers

This bill requires a local election board to designate a polling place in a senior center if it determines that at least 100 elderly individuals who attend or live at the senior center are registered voters in the precinct in which the senior center is located, unless there is a designated polling place within one-half mile of the center that serves the elderly voters who attend or live at the center. If a polling place is designated in a senior center, the center must provide without charge a facility for use as a polling place that meets all applicable polling place requirements. The local board must attempt to recruit election judges to staff a senior center polling place from any institution of higher education in the county.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2008.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential general fund expenditure increase due to costs associated with establishing additional polling places at senior centers. Any expenditure increase cannot be reliably estimated at this time.

Local Effect: Local government expenditures could increase for their share of the cost of establishing additional polling places. **This bill may impose a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Current Law: Polling places must be located as conveniently as practicable for the majority of registered voters assigned to a polling place and provide a suitable environment for an election. Polling places generally must be located in a public building, though if suitable space is not available, a local board may pay a reasonable fee to use a private building. A polling place may also be located in an adjacent precinct if a suitable location is not available within the precinct the polling place serves. An election may not be held in any building or part of a building used or occupied by an establishment that holds an alcoholic beverages license, except under certain circumstances. Additional provisions relating to the siting of polling places apply in some counties.

State law provides for separate precincts to be established on, or within one-half mile of, a campus of a public or private higher education institution under specified circumstances, including if at least 500 students, faculty, and staff are determined to be registered voters in the precinct in which the institution is located.

Local boards must administer voter registration and absentee voting for nursing homes and assisted living facilities in accordance with procedures established by the State Administrator of Elections, subject to the approval of the State Board of Elections.

Background: There are over 100 senior centers in Maryland that offer activities such as exercise programs, health screenings, and wellness seminars for seniors. These centers, some of which currently serve as polling places, are in many cases supported in some manner by local governments or are nonprofit organizations. Numerous senior living communities also exist throughout the State. SBE reported in December 2006 that there were 1,652 polling places in the State.

State Fiscal Effect: General fund expenditures could increase due to costs associated with establishing additional polling places at senior centers, though any increase cannot be reliably estimated at this time. Information with regard to the specific number of senior centers that would meet the standards set out in the bill for designation as a polling place is not readily available.

SBE advises the bill could potentially be implemented, at least to some extent, by relocating existing polling places to senior centers where necessary, though polling places in addition to the existing polling places in each county may need to be established at senior centers. This could result in additional costs for SBE related to the acquisition and use of additional voting units for the 2008 general election. SBE costs could also be increased, to the extent additional polling places are necessary, during the possible

transition to a new, paper-based voting system (Chapter 547/548 of 2007 require that the State's voting system provide a "voter-verifiable paper record" prior to the 2010 gubernatorial elections, subject to appropriation of sufficient funding in the fiscal 2009 budget).

Local Fiscal Effect: Similar to the above State effect, local government expenditures could increase due to costs associated with establishing additional polling places at senior centers, though any increase cannot be reliably estimated at this time.

Harford and Montgomery counties provided estimates of potential costs for a new polling place of \$9,400 and \$12,360, respectively, reflecting primarily voting unit and e-pollbook costs and election judge compensation. Prince George's County noted the potential for costs to be incurred by publicly operated senior centers to meet applicable polling place requirements.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland State Board of Elections, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, Harford County, Carroll County, Department of Legislative Services

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mam/ljm

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