

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2009 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**

Senate Bill 733 (Senator Raskin, *et al.*)  
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

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**Elections - Permanent Absentee Ballot List**

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This bill establishes a permanent absentee ballot list and allows specified voters to apply for permanent absentee ballot status and be placed on the permanent absentee ballot list. A voter on the list is sent an absentee ballot each time there is an election. The bill also establishes reasons for which a voter must be removed from the list and notification requirements applicable to voters that have permanent absentee ballot status. To be eligible for permanent absentee ballot status, a voter must be a member of the armed forces or foreign service, living outside the United States, a student enrolled in a higher education institution, elderly, or disabled.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** The bill will not materially affect State finances.

**Local Effect:** Expenditures at local boards of elections increase by approximately \$20,000 in FY 2010. Revenues are not affected.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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**Analysis**

**Current Law:** An individual may vote by absentee ballot except to the extent preempted by federal law. An absentee ballot application generally must be received by a local board not later than the Tuesday prior to an election. Absentee ballots are sent to voters as soon as practicable after the receipt and review of an application. A registered voter or the voter's duly authorized agent can also apply for an absentee ballot in person at the local board office through the closing of the polls on election day. Under State Board of

Elections regulations, an absentee ballot must be returned to the local board office by the closing of polls on election day or be mailed on or before election day and received by the local board by specified dates and times.

**Background:** According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, as of October 8, 2008, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Montana, and Washington allowed permanent *no-excuse* absentee voting, enabling a voter to request to receive an absentee ballot automatically for all elections. In addition, Oregon has an all vote-by-mail system. It is not clear if additional states may allow permanent absentee voting for select groups of voters (as the bill does).

**Local Fiscal Effect:** Local boards of elections will be billed by the State Board of Elections, based on voting age population, for the cost of voter registration database software enhancement and training. These costs are estimated at \$20,000 statewide. In addition, Baltimore City indicates a permanent absentee ballot list may result in increased ballot printing and mailing costs, but could not reliably estimate the increase in costs.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** HB 523 (Delegate Ross) - Ways and Means.

**Information Source(s):** State Board of Elections, Allegany and Montgomery counties, Baltimore City, Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - March 8, 2009  
ncs/hlb

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Analysis by: Scott D. Kennedy

Direct Inquiries to:  
(410) 946-5510  
(301) 970-5510