

Department of Legislative Services
2010 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 710 (Senators Harris and Raskin)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Elections - New Political Party - Petition Signatures

This bill reduces, from 10,000 to 5,000, the number of signatures of specified registered voters required to be included with a petition filed with the State Board of Elections (SBE) in order to form a new political party.

The bill takes effect January 1, 2011.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill does not substantively change State activities or operations; however, to the extent the bill's reduction of the number of signatures required for a new political party petition increases the number of petition filings and political parties formed, State general fund expenditures will increase due to costs associated with accounting for a new political party in SBE's election management system. Any increase in costs, however, cannot be reliably estimated. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Local government expenditures may increase due to costs associated with modifying the statewide voter registration database to the extent additional political parties are formed.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Any group of registered voters may form a new political party by filing a petition with the State Board of Elections that includes:

- specified information regarding the partisan organization forming the political party; and
- papers bearing the signatures of at least 10,000 registered voters who are eligible to vote in the State as of the first day of the month in which the petition is submitted.

A petition for the formation of a new political party, or any additional signatures to a petition may generally be filed at any time, with the exception of specified periods surrounding statewide and congressional special elections.

The group of voters must also adopt and file an interim constitution and bylaws. If a petition is certified in accordance with State law and the constitution and bylaws are determined to meet applicable requirements, the partisan organization is then considered a State political party.

State Fiscal Effect: The bill does not substantively change State activities or operations; however, to the extent the bill's reduction of the number of signatures required for a new political party petition increases the number of petition filings and political parties formed, State general fund expenditures will increase due to costs associated with accounting for a new political party in the reporting functions of SBE's election management system. The extent to which the bill's changes will result in additional political parties being created, however, cannot be reliably estimated. Voter registration applications and MVA voter registration-related forms are expected to be revised to reflect additional political parties in the normal course of printing.

Local Fiscal Effect: If additional political parties are formed as a result of the bill, additional costs may be incurred to make changes to the reporting functions of the statewide voter registration database. The database undergoes continuous development and whether any necessary changes would represent increased costs would depend on the amount of room (development hours) within the contract to account for the changes. Costs of statewide voter registration database modifications are billed by SBE to the local boards of elections.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: SB 947 of 2009 received a hearing in the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee, but no further action was taken.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): State Board of Elections; Maryland Department of Transportation (Motor Vehicle Administration); Carroll, Cecil, and Harford counties; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 10, 2010
mpc/mwc

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