

**Department of Legislative Services**  
2010 Session**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**

Senate Bill 293

(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 any voter 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, including if the voter fails to return an absentee ballot for two consecutive statewide general elections. Lastly, the bill requires a voter who has permanent absentee ballot status to notify the local board of elections of a change in the address to which a permanent absentee ballot is to be sent.

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**Fiscal Summary****State Effect:** None.**Local Effect:** Local government expenditures may increase in FY 2011 due to software development, personnel, and printing/mailing costs. Software development costs may total up to \$83,000 statewide. 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.

**Background:** According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, as of October 2008, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Montana, and Washington allowed permanent absentee voting, enabling a voter to request to receive an absentee ballot automatically for all elections. In addition, Oregon and Washington (with the exception of one county) conduct all elections by mail.

**Local Fiscal Effect:** Local government expenditures may increase in fiscal 2011 due to costs of software development for the statewide voter registration database, potential personnel costs associated with manually accounting for the bill's changes until the software development can be completed, and printing/mailing costs.

The State Board of Elections (SBE) indicates that changes will need to be made to the statewide voter registration database, including providing for the ability to generate reports to identify those who have applied for permanent absentee ballot status and track voters who have failed to vote in two consecutive statewide general elections. SBE estimates that such changes could result in increased development costs (billed to the local boards by SBE) of up to \$83,000 in fiscal 2011 to the extent the development cannot be included within the operations and maintenance contract for the database. The statewide voter registration database undergoes continuous development and whether the changes necessary to implement the bill would represent increased costs would depend on the amount of room (development hours) within the contract to account for the changes.

*For illustrative purposes*, if \$83,000 in increased costs is allocated among the counties, Montgomery County (representative of a large county) expenditures, for example, would increase by approximately \$14,000, while Cecil County (representative of a smaller county) expenditures would increase by approximately \$1,500.

SBE also indicates that the software development may not be complete until the latter part of fiscal 2011 and an extensive manual business process to track, update, correspond, and follow up with voters would need to be developed and implemented until that time. Local boards may have increased personnel costs as a result; however, the extent of any increase in costs is uncertain. SBE and certain local boards have also indicated the possibility of relatively minimal additional printing/mailing costs.

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## Additional Information

**Prior Introductions:** SB 733 and HB 523 of 2009, received hearings in the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee, respectively, but no further action was taken on either bill.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** State Board of Elections; Calvert, Caroline, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties; Baltimore City; National Conference of State Legislatures; U.S. Election Assistance Commission; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 24, 2010  
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