

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2011 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 126
Ways and Means

(Delegate Howard, *et al.*)

Election Law - Days of Early Voting

This bill replaces the early voting period established in State law for the 2012 presidential primary and general elections with a shorter early voting period that will apply to any future regularly scheduled primary or general election. The newly established early voting period is the second Friday and second Saturday before a regularly scheduled primary or general election, during the hours between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2011.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill is not expected to affect State finances.

Local Effect: Local government expenditures may decrease by approximately \$1.2 million over the course of FY 2012 and 2013 due to the reduction in the number of days of early voting during the 2012 presidential elections.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: For the 2012 presidential primary and general elections, each early voting center must be open from the second Saturday before a primary or general election through the Thursday before the elections. The early voting centers must be open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on each day of the early voting period, except for Sunday, when the centers must be open from 12 noon to 6 p.m.

Early voting periods for other future elections, including the 2011 Baltimore City elections, are not specified in statute.

Background: Early voting was implemented for the first time in Maryland during the 2010 gubernatorial elections for six days prior to both the primary and general elections at 46 early voting centers across the State. Statewide early voting turnout was relatively light in comparison to levels of participation in a number of other states in past elections, likely due in part to 2010 being the State's first experience with early voting.

According to unofficial State Board of Elections statistics, of Maryland voters that cast regular ballots in person at early voting centers or election day polling places (excluding provisional and absentee voters), 10.2% cast their ballots at early voting centers during the 2010 primary election and 12.6% did so at the general election. Among the individual counties, the percentage of in-person voters that voted early ranged from 4.2% in Washington County to 20.7% in Kent County for the primary election and from 4.8% in Allegany County to 24.2% in Talbot County for the general election.

Local Fiscal Effect: Local government expenditures may decrease by approximately \$1.2 million over the course of fiscal 2012 and 2013 reflecting reduced costs for local boards of elections to conduct early voting over a shorter early voting period (two days instead of six days). During the 2010 elections, the amount and type of costs incurred by the various local boards varied, with election judge compensation being the one cost that every local board incurred and most boards incurring staff overtime and voter outreach costs. Other categories of costs included early voting center rental and maintenance, costs for early voting center communications, provisional ballot supply carts, security, and other supplies. The overall cost for the 24 local boards of elections to conduct early voting for the 2010 elections was \$2.6 million.

The categories of costs that are affected by the number of days of early voting are election judge compensation, staff overtime, early voting center rental and maintenance, security, and other supplies costs. These costs totaled \$1.9 million for the 2010 elections. Assuming similar costs will be incurred for early voting during the 2012 elections and that those costs affected by the number of days of early voting would be reduced proportionally to the reduction in the number of days of early voting, under the bill local government expenditures for the 24 local boards of elections may decrease by approximately \$1.2 million over the course of both fiscal 2012 and 2013.

Similar proportional reductions in expenditures may occur for early voting during the Baltimore City elections and statewide and Baltimore City elections beyond 2012 if six-day voting periods would otherwise be established for those elections. However, because early voting periods for those elections are not established in statute, any reduction in expenditures is uncertain.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): State Board of Elections; Baltimore, Garrett, and Montgomery counties; Department of Legislative Services

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ncs/hlb

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