

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2014 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 275

(Senator Kelley)

Judicial Proceedings

State Government - Maryland Uniform Electronic Legal Materials Act

This bill establishes the Maryland Uniform Electronic Legal Materials Act. The bill requires an official publisher that publishes legal material only in an electronic record to designate the electronic record as official, under specified circumstances. In order to designate the electronic record as official, the official publisher must authenticate the electronic record in a specified manner, take specified actions to preserve and secure the record, and ensure that the material is reasonably available for use by the public on a permanent basis. The bill creates a legal presumption that authenticated legal material in an electronic record is an accurate copy of the legal material.

The bill applies to all legal material in an electronic record designated as official that is first published electronically on or after October 1, 2014.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill does not immediately affect governmental operations or finances. Because the bill does not mandate designating an electronic record as official if the material is available in another format, any potential increase in expenditures to comply with the bill may be deferred to a later date.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: Potential minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: Under the bill, “electronic” means relating to technology having electrical, digital, magnetic, wireless, optical, electromagnetic, or similar capabilities. “Electronic record” means a record created, generated, sent, communicated, received, or stored by electronic means. “Publish” means to release to the public, or cause to be released to the public, by the official publisher. “Record” means information that is inscribed on a tangible medium or that is stored in an electronic or other format and is retrievable in perceivable form.

Exhibit 1 lists the legal materials and associated official publishers impacted by the bill.

Exhibit 1 Legal Materials and Associated Official Publishers

Legal Material	Official Publisher
Maryland Constitution	Department of Legislative Services
Session Laws	Department of Legislative Services
Code of Maryland	Department of Legislative Services
Maryland Rules	Court of Appeals
Journal of the Senate of Maryland	Department of Legislative Services
Journal of House of Delegates of Maryland	Department of Legislative Services
Reported Decision of the Court of Appeals, Court of Special Appeals, a Circuit Court, a District Court	Court of Appeals
Opinion or Letter of Advice Issued by the Office of the Attorney General	Office of the Attorney General
Rule or Regulation Published in COMAR	Division of State Documents
Rule or Regulation Not Published in COMAR	Unit* of State Government (that adopted the rule or regulation)
Final Decision in a Contested Case Issued by a Unit of State Government	Unit* of State Government (that issued the decision)

*“Unit” means an executive agency, a department, a board, a commission, or any other instrumentality of the State.

Source: Department of Legislative Services

If an official publisher publishes legal material only in an electronic record, the official publisher must designate the electronic record as official. If an official publisher publishes legal material in an electronic record and in a record other than an electronic

record, the publisher may designate the electronic record as official. In order to designate the electronic record as official, the official publisher must:

- **authenticate the electronic record** by providing a method for a user to determine that the electronic record received by the user from the official publisher is unaltered from the official electronic record published by the official publisher;
- **provide for the preservation and security of the record in an electronic form or a form that is not electronic** – if the material is preserved in an electronic record, the official publisher must ensure the integrity of the record, provide for backup and disaster recovery of the record, and ensure the continuing usability of the material; and
- **ensure that the legal material is reasonably available for use by the public on a permanent basis.**

Legal material in an electronic record that is authenticated as provided above is presumed to be an accurate copy of the legal material. If another state has adopted a law substantially similar to the bill, legal material in an electronic record that is designated as official and authenticated by the official publisher in that state is presumed to be an accurate copy of the legal material. A party contesting the authentication of legal material in an electronic record authenticated under this bill has the burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence the record is not authentic.

In implementing the bill's provisions, an official publisher of legal material in an electronic record must consider the following:

- standards and practices of other jurisdictions;
- the most recent standards regarding the authentication of, preservation and security of, and public access to legal material in an electronic record and other electronic records, as adopted by the national standard-setting bodies;
- the needs of users of legal material in an electronic record;
- the view of governmental officials and entities and other interested persons; and
- to the extent practicable, methods and technologies for the authentication of, preservation and security of, and public access to legal material that are compatible with methods and technologies used by their official publishers in the State and in other states that have adopted a law substantially similar to the bill.

Moreover, in applying and construing the bill, consideration must be given to the need to promote uniformity of the law with respect to its subject matter among states that enact substantially similar laws.

Current Law/Background:

Maryland Constitution. After each election in which voters have approved amendments to the Maryland Constitution, the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) publishes the amended version and posts the document online.

Session Laws. After the Governor signs or vetoes bills, DLS publishes the *Laws of Maryland* (Session Laws) for that year. The Session Laws are a set of volumes containing all laws adopted during the previous session and all bills vetoed by the Governor with the veto messages. Beginning with the 1996 session, the Session Laws are available online through the Chapter Indexes and as a compilation, beginning with the 2007 session.

Maryland Code. DLS is required to (1) create and maintain, in the form of a statutory database, a code of Maryland and (2) maintain the structural integrity and textual accuracy of that code. The Annotated Code of Maryland, published by commercial publishers, is a multivolume compilation of the permanent public general laws. Each year, the publisher updates the code, using the newly passed laws found in the *Laws of Maryland*. Except for any copyrighted material owned by the publisher, such as section captions, editor's notes, and applicable court case references, the code is accessible through the "Search" and "Statute Text" links on the General Assembly website homepage.

Journals of the Senate and House of Delegates. DLS is required to sell, exchange, or otherwise distribute bound volumes of the journals of the Senate and the House. The journals, prepared by the Secretary of the Senate and the Chief Clerk of the House, are the official record of the proceedings of the Senate and the House for the entire session. These documents are published in both softbound and hardbound versions. The journals are available on the General Assembly website from 2007 forward. Beginning with the 1996 session, the daily Senate and House floor proceedings are available on the General Assembly website.

Maryland Rules. The Division of State Documents must publish, in an issue of the *Maryland Register*, each rule of court that the Court of Appeals adopts or permits to be adopted. The Judiciary advises that these documents have been posted on its website since 2003.

Reported Decisions of the Courts. The State Reporter, appointed by the Court of Appeals, is responsible for the publication and distribution of the official opinions of the Court of Appeals and the Court of Special Appeals. Opinions designated for publication must be published within six months of the decision in the case. Reported opinions filed

since 1995 are available on the Judiciary website. However, the Judiciary website provides the disclaimer that only bound volumes of the *Maryland Reports* and *Maryland Appellate Reports* are considered the final, official texts of the opinions of the Court of Appeals and the Court of Special Appeals.

Rules or Regulations Adopted by a Unit of State Government. Most rules and regulations adopted by a unit of government are published in the *Code of Maryland Administrative Regulations* (COMAR). The Administrative Procedure Act sets forth requirements for the publication of regulations once they are adopted by units of government under the jurisdiction of the Act. A regulation may be in any form – including a guideline, rule, standard, or statement of interpretation or policy. After adopting a regulation, a unit is required to submit to the Administrator of State Documents a notice of adoption, for publication in the *Maryland Register*. The official text of a regulation submitted for publication in the *Maryland Register* is the *Maryland Register* until incorporation in COMAR. The most recent issues of the *Maryland Register* are available online. After incorporation, the printed version of COMAR is the official text. COMAR is also available online.

Opinions or Letters of Advice Issued by the Office of the Attorney General. Formal opinions of the Attorney General are letters written to State officials that have gone through a specified review process. Opinions are required to be published annually, in a bound volume. The opinions are also posted on the Office of the Attorney General website. Letters of advice issued by the Office of the Attorney General that have not undergone the review process of formal opinion letters are not subject to the same publication requirements.

Final Decision in a Contested Case Issued by a Unit of State Government. In 1990, the General Assembly created the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH). OAH administrative law judges hear and rule on contested agency actions for over 30 State agencies. All OAH hearings are recorded or have a court reporter. Audio recordings and transcripts of the hearings are available upon written request.

According to the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws (NCCUSL), eight states have enacted the Uniform Electronic Legal Materials Act, including California, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Minnesota, Nevada, North Dakota, and Oregon.

State Fiscal Effect: The bill will have a minimal immediate fiscal impact on State official publishers because a publisher that publishes its material in a form other than electronically may elect to continue to publish its material in that format.

To the extent that an official publisher elects to designate electronic records as official, the costs vary depending on the method chosen. In 2011, following the passage of the California Uniform Electronic Legal Materials Act, the Office of Legislative Counsel of California released a study of various methods of electronic authentication. The study found that initial costs of developing a system varied from as little as \$1,049 to as much as \$178,100, not including development, integration costs, or standard hardware platforms. Annual costs for the systems featured in the study ranged from \$618 to nearly \$45,000.

Official publishers that already comply with the standards set forth in this bill and elect to exclusively publish materials electronically may experience a decrease in expenditures from eliminating print formats.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 46 (Delegate Arora) - Health and Government Operations.

Information Source(s): National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws; Office of Legislative Counsel of California; Office of the Attorney General; Office of Administrative Hearings; Department of Budget and Management; Department of Natural Resources; Maryland Department of the Environment; Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts); Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation; Secretary of State; Maryland Department of Transportation; Department of Legislative Services

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