

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2015 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 711 (Senator Raskin)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Ways and Means

Election Law - Voting by Absentee Ballot - Prepaid Postage for the Return of Ballots

This bill requires that absentee ballot materials sent to a voter by mail include prepaid postage on the envelope provided for the return of the ballot. The State Board of Elections (SBE) must reimburse a county for the cost of prepaid postage on the envelopes issued by a county to voters for the return of absentee ballots.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase by \$13,000 in FY 2016 and by varying amounts in future fiscal years in accordance with varying levels of absentee voting in different elections. Revenues are not affected.

| (in dollars) | FY 2016 | FY 2017 | FY 2018 | FY 2019 | FY 2020 |
|----------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Revenues | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| GF Expenditure | 13,000 | 110,000 | 14,000 | 34,000 | 13,000 |
| Net Effect | (\$13,000) | (\$110,000) | (\$14,000) | (\$34,000) | (\$13,000) |

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate effect

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law/Background: An individual may vote by absentee ballot except to the extent preempted by federal law. An absentee ballot may be requested in writing (there are State and federal forms that can be used) or online through the SBE website. The voter

may choose to receive the ballot by mail, by fax, through the Internet, or by hand at a local board of elections office. The voter may return the ballot by mailing it, postmarked on or before election day, or delivering it to the local board of elections in person by the close of polls on election day.

For information on the level of use of absentee voting by voters in recent elections, see the **Appendix – Early and Absentee Voting**.

State Fiscal Effect: General fund expenditures increase by \$13,000 in fiscal 2016 and by varying amounts in future fiscal years according to varying levels of absentee voting for the different elections within a four-year election cycle (presidential primary and general elections and gubernatorial primary and general elections). General fund expenditures increase more significantly, for example, in fiscal 2017 (when the presidential general election occurs), by \$110,000. This estimate is based on the numbers of absentee ballots that were sent by mail in the 2012 and 2014 elections and assumes an average per envelope cost of \$0.75 for prepaid postage. The postage required for the envelopes will vary based on the length of the individual ballots and potentially also due to other material returned with the ballots, such as a certification of assistance for voters that receive assistance casting an absentee ballot.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): State Board of Elections, Baltimore City, Frederick and Montgomery counties, U.S. Postal Service, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 18, 2015
min/hlb

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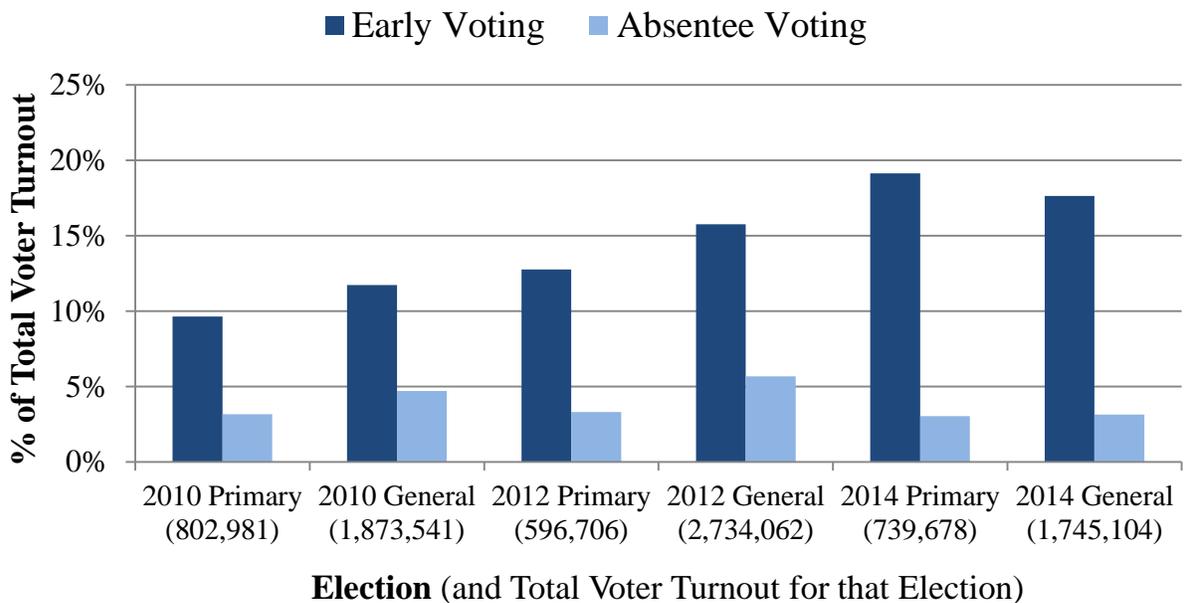
Appendix – Early and Absentee Voting

In Maryland

Maryland voters have the option of voting at an early voting center prior to election day or by absentee ballot, as alternatives to voting at a polling place on election day. In-person early voting at early voting centers was first implemented in 2010 and “no excuse” absentee voting (not requiring a reason that a voter cannot vote in person) was first allowed in 2006.

Exhibit 1 shows that, as a percentage of overall turnout in the 2010 through 2014 elections, use of early voting has been generally increasing, from just under 10% in the 2010 primary election to over 15% in recent elections, and use of absentee voting has been relatively consistent, between 3% and 6%.

Exhibit 1
Maryland Early and Absentee Voting Turnout
2010-2014



Source: State Board of Elections; Department of Legislative Services

There were additional early voting centers and a longer early voting period for the 2014 elections pursuant to Chapters 157 and 158 of 2013. **Exhibit 2** and **Exhibit 3** show the changes made by Chapters 157 and 158. The number of early voting centers in each county for the 2014 elections is shown in **Exhibit 4**. A voter may vote at any early voting center in the voter's county of residence. In addition, pursuant to Chapters 157 and 158, an individual will be able to both register to vote and vote at an early voting center beginning in 2016.

Chapters 157 and 158 also expanded and clarified the methods by which a voter may request and receive an absentee ballot. An absentee ballot must be requested in writing (there are State and federal forms that can be used) or, pursuant to Chapters 157 and 158, a request can be submitted online through the State Board of Elections website. The available methods for a voter to receive an absentee ballot are (1) by mail; (2) by facsimile transmission; (3) through the Internet; or (4) by hand during an in-person transaction. To return an absentee ballot, a voter may either mail in the completed ballot, postmarked on or before election day, or deliver it to the local board of elections in person by the close of polls on election day.

In Other States

Research by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) indicates that 33 states and the District of Columbia offer in-person early voting, and 27 states and the District of Columbia permit no excuse absentee voting. In addition, Colorado, Oregon, and Washington conduct all elections by mail.

The timing and length of early voting periods varies among the early voting states. According to NCSL, the average starting time for early voting, across the 33 states, is 22 days before an election. NCSL indicates that the average length of early voting periods across the states is 19 days and early voting typically ends just a few days before election day, somewhere between the Thursday and the Monday before election day.

Exhibit 2
Early Voting Centers

| Prior to Chs. 157/158 | | Under Chs. 157/158 | |
|---|--|---|---|
| <u>Registered Voters in a County</u> | <u>Early Voting Centers</u> | <u>Registered Voters in a County</u> | <u>Early Voting Centers*</u> |
| < 150,000 | 1 | < 125,000 | 1 |
| 150,000-300,000 | 3 | 125,000-300,000 | 3 |
| > 300,000 | 5 | 300,000-450,000 | 5 |
| | | > 450,000 | 8 |

*In addition to these required centers, each county may establish one additional early voting center if the State Board of Elections, in collaboration with the local board of elections, and the governing body of the county agree to establish an additional center.

Exhibit 3
Early Voting Days and Hours

| Prior to Chs. 157/158 | | Under Chs. 157/158 |
|--|--|---|
| <u>2010 Elections</u> | <u>2012 Elections</u> | <u>2014 and Future Elections</u> |
| <i><u>Days (6)</u></i> | <i><u>Days (6)</u></i> | <i><u>Days (8)</u></i> |
| Second Friday before the election through Thursday before the election, excluding Sunday | Second Saturday before the election through Thursday before the election | Second Thursday before the election through Thursday before the election |
| <i><u>Hours</u></i> | <i><u>Hours</u></i> | <i><u>Hours</u></i> |
| 10 a.m.-8 p.m. (each day) | 10 a.m.-8 p.m. (Saturday; Monday-Thursday) 12 noon-6 p.m. (Sunday) | Presidential general election: 8 a.m.-8 p.m. (each day) All other elections: 10 a.m.-8 p.m. (each day) |

Exhibit 4
Early Voting Centers in Each County

| Jurisdiction | Registered Voters (December 2013) | Early Voting Centers in 2012 | Early Voting Centers in the 2014 General Election* |
|---------------------|--|---|---|
| Montgomery | 625,030 | 5 | 9 |
| Prince George's | 567,823 | 5 | 8 |
| Baltimore | 512,686 | 5 | 8 |
| Baltimore City | 376,738 | 5 | 6 |
| Anne Arundel | 351,794 | 5 | 5 |
| Howard | 194,938 | 3 | 3 |
| Harford | 162,170 | 1 | 4 |
| Frederick | 147,538 | 1 | 3 |
| Carroll | 113,430 | 1 | 1 |
| Charles | 98,353 | 1 | 2 |
| Washington | 88,336 | 1 | 1 |
| St. Mary's | 64,148 | 1 | 1 |
| Cecil | 61,087 | 1 | 1 |
| Calvert | 59,606 | 1 | 1 |
| Wicomico | 58,216 | 1 | 1 |
| Allegany | 42,223 | 1 | 1 |
| Worcester | 36,758 | 1 | 1 |
| Queen Anne's | 32,278 | 1 | 2 |
| Talbot | 25,705 | 1 | 1 |
| Dorchester | 20,475 | 1 | 1 |
| Garrett | 19,001 | 1 | 1 |
| Caroline | 18,463 | 1 | 1 |
| Somerset | 13,160 | 1 | 1 |
| Kent | 12,652 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 3,702,608 | 46 | 64 |

*There were 63 early voting centers for the 2014 primary election. One center was added, in Charles County, prior to the general election.