

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2016 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 83 (Delegates Carr and Rosenberg)
Ways and Means

Elections - Early Voting Centers - Sunday Voting

This bill moves the early voting period prior to each primary and general election closer to Election Day so that it runs from the second Sunday before the election through the Sunday before the election.

The bill takes effect January 1, 2017.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures may increase by a significant amount beginning in FY 2018, depending on how the bill is implemented. Under one method, total expenditures to be shared by the State and local boards of elections include \$2.5 million for initial computer networking costs and an additional \$1.5 million per election, for telecommunications and technical support. An alternative method, while requiring local expenditures, does not materially affect State finances.

Local Effect: Under the networking method of implementation, county expenditures may increase by a significant amount in FY 2018 and future years due to the initial costs of networking and ongoing telecommunications and technical support shared by the State and local boards of elections. Under an alternative method of implementation, county expenditures increase by at least \$250,000 annually beginning in FY 2018. **This bill imposes a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Current Law/Background: Each early voting center is open for voting beginning the second Thursday before a primary or general election through the Thursday before the election. For further background information on early voting see the attached **Appendix – Early and Absentee Voting**.

Under Chapters 157 and 158 of 2013, the State Board of Elections (SBE) was required to conduct a detailed analysis of options and administrative requirements for extending the early voting period to the Sunday before Election Day. SBE contracted with the University of Baltimore's Schaefer Center for Public Policy to conduct this study as well as another study required under Chapters 157 and 158 on voting wait times. The Schaefer Center's report ([*Voting and the Administration of Elections in Maryland*](#), January 15, 2014) describes the process that the local boards of elections and SBE go through between the end of early voting and Election Day to update the information in Election Day E-pollbooks with those who voted early and deliver the E-pollbooks to the Election Day polling places. According to the report, if early voting were to end on the Sunday before Election Day, managing the same process in a much shorter period of time would be very difficult for smaller jurisdictions and nearly impossible for larger jurisdictions.

The report presents two options to handle providing Election Day polling places with information on voters that already voted during early voting, if early voting were to run through the Sunday before Election Day:

- (1) Network Election Day polling places with SBE's central database server to allow for the Election Day E-pollbooks to have access to updated voter information without the time-consuming process of updating information on each E-pollbook (the report estimates the cost of this option would be \$2.5 million for the initial build-out and an additional \$1.5 million for each election for telecommunications costs and additional technical support personnel).
- (2) Forego updating Election Day E-pollbooks but provide polling places with a printed list of early voters and late absentee voters that would be used to "pre-check" voters at polling places prior to being checked in on an E-pollbook to filter out any voters that had already voted early (the report estimates the cost of this option would be \$250,000 each election for an additional "pre-check" election judge at each of the 1,100 polling places with more than 1,000 voters on Election Day).

State Fiscal Effect: To the extent the option presented in the Schaefer Center report of networking Election Day polling places with SBE's central database server is undertaken for the 2018 and future elections, State general fund expenditures may increase significantly. As mentioned above, the Schaefer Center report estimated this option would

cost \$2.5 million for the initial build-out of the network and an additional \$1.5 million per election for telecommunication costs and additional technical support personnel. It is not clear at this time how these costs would be allocated among the State and local boards of elections. Alternatively, if printed lists of early voters and late absentee voters are used to “pre-check” voters at polling places in place of the networking, State finances are not materially affected.

Local Fiscal Effect: To the extent the option presented in the Schaefer Center report of networking Election Day polling places with SBE’s central database server is undertaken for the 2018 and future elections, county expenditures may increase significantly in fiscal 2018 and future years. Alternatively, if printed lists of early voters and late absentee voters are used to “pre-check” voters at polling places in place of the networking, county expenditures increase collectively by at least \$250,000 annually.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: SB 200 of 2014 received a hearing in the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee but no further action was taken. Its cross file, HB 263, received a hearing in the House Ways and Means Committee but no further action was taken.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): State Board of Elections; Harford and Wicomico counties; Maryland Association of Counties; University of Baltimore, Schaefer Center for Public Policy; Department of Legislative Services

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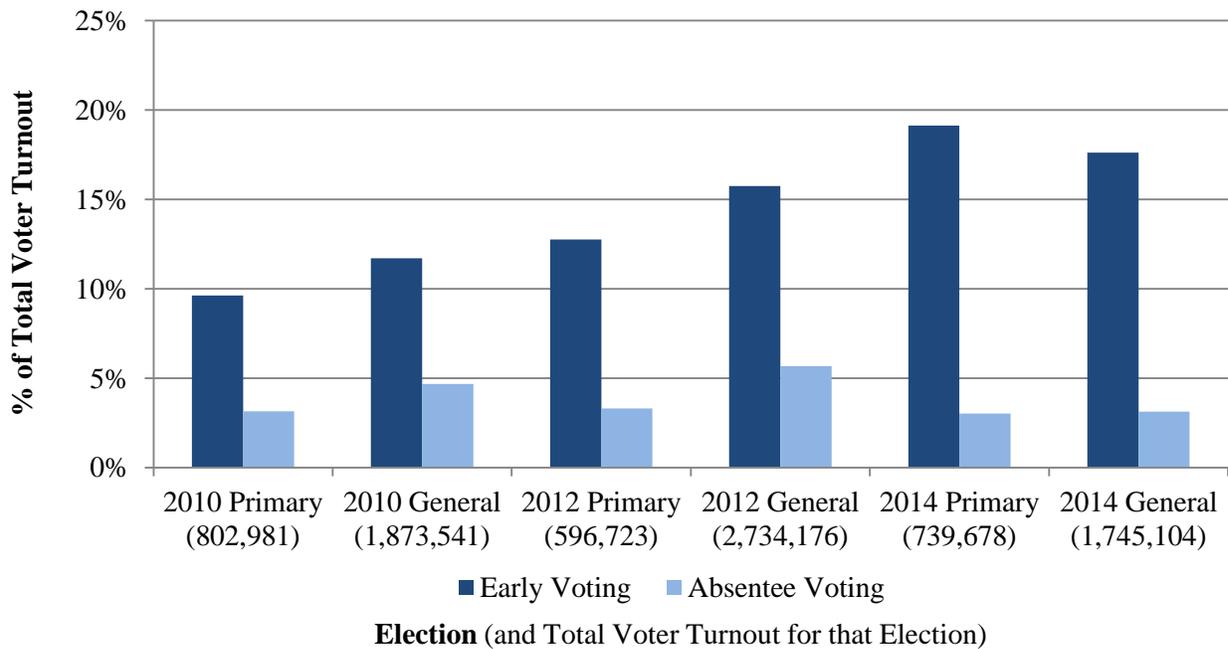
Appendix – Early and Absentee Voting

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 2016 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 (or change his/her voter registration address) and vote at an early voting center 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 37 states and the District of Columbia offer some form of in-person early voting, and 27 states and the District of Columbia permit no excuse absentee voting. 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 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.

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 2015)	Early Voting Centers in the 2016 Elections
Montgomery	631,981	9
Prince George's	551,143	8
Baltimore	536,220	9
Baltimore City	369,051	6
Anne Arundel	362,933	5
Howard	201,297	3
Harford	169,209	4
Frederick	157,108	3
Carroll	118,077	1
Charles	103,480	2
Washington	91,387	1
St. Mary's	66,363	1
Cecil	62,297	1
Calvert	61,103	1
Wicomico	57,793	1
Allegany	42,709	1
Worcester	36,708	1
Queen Anne's	33,686	2
Talbot	26,254	1
Dorchester	20,738	1
Garrett	19,300	2
Caroline	19,041	1
Somerset	13,076	1
Kent	12,884	1
Total	3,763,838	66

Source: State Board of Elections
