

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2021 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 656
Ways and Means

(Delegate Crosby)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Election Law - Early Voting Centers - Bus Stops

This bill requires that – if an early voting center is located within one-half mile of a fixed local bus route – buses operating on that route must, to the maximum extent practicable, allow passengers to embark and disembark at the entrance of the early voting center during the times the center is open for voting. The bill applies only to a fixed local bus route (1) funded by a county or municipal corporation and operated by the local government or a contractor or (2) in Baltimore City and Baltimore County only, funded and operated by the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA). It does not apply to specified long-distance commuter bus routes funded by MTA.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) expenditures and revenues may increase annually, beginning in FY 2022, as discussed below.

Local Effect: Local government finances may be affected, beginning in FY 2022, as discussed below.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Pursuant to statute, each early voting center must satisfy general requirements that apply to polling places, including that each polling place must be located as conveniently as practicable for the majority of registered voters assigned to the polling place.

No later than six months before a primary election, the State Board of Elections (SBE), in collaboration with the local board in each county, must designate each early voting center in that county.

SBE regulations require local boards of elections to submit to SBE, at least seven months before a primary election, a form for each proposed early voting center that includes information on, among other things, whether the proposed early voting center:

- is located within specified distances of where specified percentages of the registered voters in the county live;
- is served by public transportation and roads; and
- has parking facilities sufficient for early voting taking into consideration the normal business activities of the proposed early voting center.

Upon receipt of a form for a proposed early voting center, the SBE regulations require the State Administrator of Elections to review the form and make a recommendation to SBE as to whether to accept or reject the proposed early voting center. Under the regulations, SBE must vote on a local board's proposed early voting center within 30 days of receipt of the form and give deference to a proposed early voting center that meets the criteria on the form.

State and Local Fiscal Effect: TTF expenditures and revenues may increase annually, beginning in fiscal 2022, due to the deviation of MTA bus routes in Baltimore City and Baltimore County to early voting centers within one-half mile of a route. Based on bus operations cost information provided by MTA, it appears that TTF expenditures may increase in the range of \$10,000 over the course of the eight days of early voting, for each deviation of a bus route to an early voting center, due to lengthening of operations for existing buses on those routes and/or the addition of a bus to a given route to maintain service levels despite the lengthening of the route. In the 2020 general election, there were 19 early voting centers in Baltimore City and Baltimore County combined. If more than 10 deviations of bus routes to early voting centers are required under the bill, increased expenditures may surpass \$100,000 each fiscal year.

The increase in expenditures may be offset, at least to some extent, by increased fare revenue from deviated routes during early voting to the extent that additional individuals use the bus routes in order to reach early voting centers as a result of the route deviations. The extent of any increase in revenues, however, cannot be reliably estimated.

Local government finances may also be affected by deviation of local bus routes to early voting centers in other jurisdictions. However, in jurisdictions contacted (Calvert, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties), local officials anticipate that the bill will have minimal or no impact on local transit expenditures based on the current locations of early

voting centers and local bus routes. This estimate assumes that the bill does not require expansion of service hours of any routes that do not otherwise provide service throughout all early voting hours.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 487 of 2020 received a hearing in the House Ways and Means Committee and was referred to interim study.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Calvert, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's counties; Maryland Department of Transportation; Department of Legislative Services

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