

HB 781

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

House Bill 781

Ways and Means

(Delegate Roberts, *et al.*)

Education, Energy, and the Environment

**Election Law - Polling Place Procedures - Voting by Elderly Voters and Voters
With Disabilities (Accessible and Expedited Voting Act of Maryland)**

This bill requires the State Board of Elections (SBE) to establish guidelines for, and the local boards of elections to implement, a process to expedite voting for elderly voters and voters with disabilities at early voting centers and polling places, beginning with the 2026 primary election. The existing election judge training program must include instruction on the guidelines. SBE must monitor the implementation of the guidelines and submit a report, that includes any implementation challenges and recommendations, to the General Assembly by January 15 of each year immediately following a statewide election. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2025.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase beginning in FY 2026, as discussed below. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Local government expenditures increase beginning in FY 2026, as discussed below. Revenues are not affected. **This bill imposes a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary:

Expedited Voting for Elderly Voters and Voters with Disabilities

The bill requires SBE to establish guidelines for the local boards of elections to implement a process to expedite voting for elderly (age 65 or older) voters and voters with disabilities, as defined in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), at each early voting center and polling place in the State.

The guidelines established by SBE must include (1) dedicated expedited lines for elderly voters and voters with disabilities and (2) clearly marked signage indicating the availability of expedited services.

The guidelines must be implemented by the local boards beginning with the statewide primary election held in 2026 and are not required to be implemented for any special elections that may occur before that election.

The bill requires that the existing election judge training program developed by SBE, in consultation with the local boards, include instruction on the guidelines for expediting voting for elderly voters and voters with disabilities.

Monitoring and Reporting Requirements

The bill requires SBE to monitor the implementation of the guidelines by the local boards and submit a report to the General Assembly by January 15 of each year immediately following a statewide election. The report must include (1) any challenges to implementing the guidelines and (2) any recommendations to improve the guidelines.

Current Law:

Assistance and Access for Elderly Voters and Voters with Disabilities

SBE, in consultation with the election directors of the local boards of elections, must specify and produce certain informational materials to be posted in each early voting center and polling place, including instructions relating to the availability of assistance to elderly and disabled voters.

Each early voting center and polling place must, whenever practicable, be selected and arranged to avoid architectural and other barriers that impede access or voting by elderly

and physically disabled voters. If the polling place assigned to an elderly or disabled voter is not structurally barrier free, the voter may request a reassignment by the local board.

A voting system selected, certified, and implemented by SBE, in consultation with the local boards, must (1) provide access to voters with disabilities that is equivalent to access afforded voters without disabilities without creating a segregated ballot for voters with disabilities; (2) ensure the independent, private casting, inspection, verification, and correction of secret ballots by voters with disabilities in an accessible media by both visual and nonvisual means, including synchronized audio output and enhanced visual display; and (3) comply with both ADA and the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA), including accessibility standards adopted as part of the Voluntary Voting System Guidelines pursuant to HAVA.

Election Judge Training Program

SBE is required to develop (and oversee the implementation of), in consultation with the local boards of elections, a program of instruction of election judges. The training materials used by the program may include (1) an instruction manual and other written directives; (2) curriculum for training sessions; and (3) audiovisuals. SBE must provide election judges with uniform statewide training on the voting system, including (1) all features of the voting system that provide access to voters with disabilities and (2) the rights of voters with disabilities, including those rights guaranteed by State and federal law. Each local board must conduct election judge training based on the program developed by SBE, and each election judge, unless appointed under emergency circumstances, must participate in the program.

State Expenditures: General fund expenditures increase beginning in fiscal 2026 for SBE to reimburse each local board for \$50 of the minimum \$100 extra compensation paid to each returning election judge (pursuant to [§ 10-205](#) of the Election Law Article) that is hired to implement the bill (discussed under Local Fiscal Effect). The extent of any increase cannot be reliably estimated; however, for *illustrative purposes*, if two additional election judges are needed at 25% of the Election Day polling places and at each early voting center, and one additional election judge is needed at an additional 25% of Election Day polling places, SBE costs increase by approximately \$66,000. This estimate assumes that, on average, half of the election judges who provide expedited voting for elderly voters and voters with disabilities are returning election judges.

SBE advises it can establish guidelines, make changes to its election judge training program, and meet the monitoring and reporting requirements with existing resources.

Local Expenditures: Local government expenditures are expected to increase beginning in fiscal 2026 depending on each county's approach to implementing the bill's

requirements of an expedited process for elderly voters and voters with disabilities. Of the counties that provided responses, some counties indicated that the bill's requirements can be implemented at little or no cost while others expect to incur costs for additional election judges and for the signs required by the bill.

For *illustrative purposes*, regarding the more significant cost of additional election judges, if two additional election judges are needed at 25% of the election day polling places and at each early voting center, and one additional election judge is needed at an additional 25% of Election Day polling places, local government expenditures collectively increase by \$819,000 for regular election judge compensation (\$753,000) and the local boards' \$50 share of the minimum \$100 extra compensation provided to returning election judges (\$66,000). This estimate assumes that:

- on average, half of the election judges who provide expedited voting for elderly voters and voters with disabilities are returning election judges; and
- the election judges are paid the base regular compensation rate of \$250 per day and \$50 for training.

Anne Arundel and Baltimore counties estimate their costs for signs to be \$5,000 and not more than \$3,000, respectively, in fiscal 2026.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: SB 66 (Senator Ellis) - Education, Energy, and the Environment.

Information Source(s): Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Cecil, and Frederick counties; Maryland Association of Counties; Maryland State Board of Elections; Department of Legislative Services

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