

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 73 (Senator Ellis)
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 emergency bill requires the State Board of Elections (SBE) to establish guidelines for, and the local boards of elections to implement, a process to accommodate and expedite voting for elderly voters and voters with disabilities at early voting centers and polling places. The existing election judge training program also must include instruction on best practices for assisting elderly voters and voters with disabilities. SBE must monitor the implementation of the guidelines and submit an annual report to the General Assembly by January 15 of each year.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase in FY 2026 by \$40,000 for contractual services, plus an additional, indeterminate amount (\$66,000, under one illustrative scenario) for election judge compensation. Ongoing election judge compensation costs are incurred in future years. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Local government expenditures increase by an indeterminate amount for election judge compensation (\$819,000, under one illustrative scenario) and signs. Revenues are not affected. **This bill imposes a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary:

Accommodation and 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 accommodate and expedite voting for elderly (age 65 or older) voters and voters with disabilities, as defined in the federal 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; (2) clearly marked signage indicating the availability of expedited services; (3) priority seating in waiting areas for elderly voters and voters with disabilities; and (4) specific provisions for high-traffic early voting centers and polling places.

The local boards must implement the guidelines established by SBE and collect feedback from elderly voters and voters with disabilities on the accommodations and expedited voting process while voting at early voting centers and polling places is in progress and make immediate adjustments to the process as necessary.

Election Judge Training Program

The bill requires that the existing election judge training program developed by SBE, in consultation with the local boards, include instruction on best practices for assisting elderly voters and voters with disabilities, as defined in ADA.

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. The report must include (1) any challenges to implementing the guidelines; (2) an analysis of the effectiveness of the accommodations and expedited voting process; (3) a summary of feedback on the accommodations and expedited voting process from elderly voters and voters with disabilities; and (4) 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 Fiscal Effect: General fund expenditures increase in fiscal 2026 (due to the bill's emergency status) by \$40,000 for contractual services, plus an additional, indeterminate amount (\$66,000, under one illustrative scenario) for election judge compensation (in fiscal 2026 and future years):

- Contractual services are needed in fiscal 2026 only – due to the limited timeframe in which the bill needs to be implemented for the 2026 primary election – for

temporary trainers to (1) educate local election directors on the guidelines established by SBE under the bill; (2) support revision of election judge training; and (3) carry out a compressed schedule of trainings (or retrainings if election judge training has already occurred in a given jurisdiction) (\$40,000).

- As discussed below (under Local Fiscal Effect), additional election judges are expected to be needed to implement the bill, in fiscal 2026 and future years. SBE is required (pursuant to [§ 10-205](#) of the Election Law Article) to reimburse each local board for \$50 of the minimum \$100 extra compensation paid to each returning election judge that is hired to implement the bill. 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 accommodation and expedited voting for elderly voters and voters with disabilities are returning election judges.

Local Fiscal Effect: Local government expenditures are expected to increase for election judge compensation (in fiscal 2026 and future years) and signs (in fiscal 2026 only) needed to implement 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 illustrative estimate assumes that:

- on average, half of the election judges who provide accommodation and 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.

Montgomery County estimates its costs for signs to be \$2,500 in fiscal 2026.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See SB 66 and HB 781 of 2025.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Baltimore City; Montgomery and Worcester counties; Maryland Association of Counties; Maryland State Board of Elections; Department of Legislative Services

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