

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 454 (Delegate Hornberger, *et al.*)
Government, Labor, and Elections

Election Law - Voter Registration Eligibility - U.S. Citizenship Verification
(SAVE Our Elections Act of 2026)

This emergency bill requires the State Administrator of Elections to enroll the State in the federal Systematic Alien Verification of Entitlement (SAVE) Program to verify the U.S. citizenship of voter registration applicants and registered voters. Local boards must use the SAVE Program to determine if an applicant is qualified, and if a report from the program indicates the individual lacks U.S. citizenship, the election director must mail a notice of ineligibility. An individual who disputes this finding may file an appeal with the State Board of Elections (SBE) and provide documentary evidence of citizenship; however, if no timely appeal is filed, the voter registration application is rejected or the voter registration is canceled and the individual is removed from the statewide voter registration list.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase by at least \$1.0 million, likely over the course of FY 2026 and 2027, as discussed below. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Local government expenditures increase by at least \$1.0 million, likely over the course of FY 2026 and 2027, as discussed below. Revenues are not affected. **This bill imposes a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary:

SAVE Program Enrollment

The bill requires the State Administrator of Elections to enroll the State in the SAVE Program for the purpose of verifying the U.S. citizenship of individuals who have applied to register to vote or have registered to vote in accordance with State law.

The State Administrator must (1) make arrangements with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to receive reports of names of Maryland residents that have been submitted to the SAVE Program for verification of U.S. citizenship for the purpose of voter registration in the State and (2) transmit to the appropriate local board the information gathered.

“SAVE Program” means the federal SAVE Program operated by USCIS in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Citizenship Verification

The bill specifies that, when a voter registration application is received by a local board of elections and the applicant resides in the county of the local board, the local board’s determination of whether the applicant is qualified to become a registered voter must include verifying the U.S. citizenship of the applicant through the SAVE Program in accordance with regulations adopted by SBE.

The bill requires existing regulations adopted by SBE for the administration of voter registration during early voting and on Election Day to include (1) a process to verify an applicant’s U.S. citizenship through the SAVE Program and (2) an appeal process to dispute reports of the SAVE Program that an individual lacks U.S. citizenship in accordance with the bill.

Appeal Process

Whenever a report is received from the SAVE Program with the name of an individual who has applied to register or registered to vote but is not a U.S. citizen, the appropriate election director must mail to the address shown on the voter registration application or statewide voter registration list, by regular U.S. mail, a notice of ineligibility stating:

- the individual is not a U.S. citizen as reported by the SAVE Program;
- the individual is ineligible to register to vote; and

- unless the individual appeals the SAVE Program report of lack of U.S. citizenship (1) the individual's voter registration application is rejected or (2) the individual will be removed from the statewide voter registration list.

An individual who disputes a report of the SAVE Program that the individual lacks U.S. citizenship may file an appeal with SBE in accordance with procedures established by SBE. An individual who receives a notice of ineligibility may (1) file an appeal to the refusal to register or the removal from the statewide voter registration list with SBE and (2) provide documentary evidence satisfactory to SBE of U.S. citizenship.

If the individual files a timely appeal, the State Administrator of Elections may, after consideration of the documentary evidence provided, direct an election director to (1) add the individual to the statewide voter registration list; (2) terminate the removal process and retain the individual on the statewide voter registration list; or (3) refer the matter to the local board for a hearing to determine the individual's U.S. citizenship.

If an individual who receives a notice of ineligibility fails to file timely an appeal, the election director must (1) reject the individual's voter registration application or (2) cancel the individual's voter registration and remove the individual from the statewide voter registration list.

SBE must adopt regulations in accordance with the requirements of the bill for the establishment of an appeal process for disputes of a report of the SAVE program that the individual lacks U.S. citizenship.

Current Law:

Voter Eligibility and Registration

Under State law, with certain exceptions, an individual may register to vote if the individual is a citizen of the United States, is at least age 16, and is a resident of the State as of the day the individual seeks to register.

However, an individual under the age of 18 who is registered to vote may not vote except in a primary election in which candidates are nominated for a general or special election that will occur when the individual is at least age 18.

An individual may apply to become a registered voter through a number of means including (1) visiting an election board office; (2) by mail; (3) when applying for services at a voter registration agency (specified public and nongovernmental agencies designated by SBE, including agencies providing public assistance and services for individuals with disabilities, public higher education institutions, military recruiting offices, and

one-stop career centers in the Maryland Department of Labor); (4) during an applicable transaction at automatic voter registration agencies, which are the Motor Vehicle Administration, the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange, local departments of social services, and the Mobility Certification Office in the Maryland Transit Administration; (5) through SBE's online voter registration system; or (6) at an early voting center or an Election Day polling place in their county of residence.

When a voter registration application is received by a local board of elections, the local board must (1) if the applicant resides in the county of the local board, determine whether the applicant is qualified to become a registered voter or (2) if the applicant resides in a different county in the State, immediately forward the application to the proper county. The information contained in the voter registration application for a qualified applicant must be electronically entered into the statewide voter registration list on an expedited basis at the time voter registration information is provided to the local board and must be assigned to the county in which the applicant resides unless registration is closed.

Voter Notification

The election director in the county where a voter registration applicant resides must send a voter acknowledgment notice, in a format prescribed by SBE, to each applicant informing them whether he or she is qualified to become registered and, if not qualified, the reasons why.

A voter notification card sent to a qualified applicant may serve as a voter acknowledgment notice. The voter notification card must contain the name and address of the voter, the date of issue, and the district or ward and precinct of the voter. SBE regulations also require that the registered voter's party affiliation, if any, and name and address of the appropriate polling place be included on the card. The card is evidence that the individual to whom it is issued is a registered voter on the date appearing on the card. The election director must issue a replacement card on request of the voter and a new card when a relevant change is made in the voter's registration record if the voter continues to reside in the county.

State and Local Fiscal Effect: State general fund and local government expenditures are expected to increase by at least \$2.0 million (combined), likely over the course of fiscal 2026 and 2027 in the event that all changes necessary to implement the bill cannot feasibly be made within the remainder of fiscal 2026. This figure is based on preliminary estimates from SBE, which advises that costs will likely increase once it determines the full scale of changes needed to voter registration-related systems and procedures. It is uncertain at this time how the full costs will be divided between the State and local boards; however, for the purposes of this fiscal and policy note, it is assumed that these costs are split evenly.

Based on SBE's preliminary assessment of changes needed to implement the bill, the categories of costs incurred include:

- **revision of voter registration forms** – online voter registration and all registration forms, including materials used by automatic voter registration agencies will need to be updated to collect social security numbers (or other identifiers needed for submission to the SAVE Program);
- **public education campaign** – SBE anticipates that a public education campaign will be conducted to inform the public regarding the additional information required from registration applicants;
- **systems modifications** – significant modifications are needed to the voter registration database and online voter registration and automatic voter registration systems in order to facilitate citizenship verification through the SAVE Program;
- **additional provisional ballot materials and canvassing personnel** – to the extent the SAVE Program verification requirement reduces the number of same-day registration applicants who are able to qualify to vote a regular ballot upon registration at an early voting center or Election Day polling place (and instead need to vote a provisional ballot), additional provisional ballot materials and canvassing personnel are needed;
- **revision of provisional ballot and training materials and election judge training** – training materials for local boards and election judges, and provisional ballot materials, need to be revised to reflect the additional identification information needed for same-day registration, and some election judges will need to be retrained for the 2026 primary election (if election judge training has already occurred in a given jurisdiction); and
- **SBE staff position to manage appeals process** – an additional SBE staff position is expected to be needed to manage the appeals process identified in the bill, for individuals who dispute a SAVE Program report.

Additional Information

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

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Carroll and Harford counties; Maryland State Board of Elections; Department of Legislative Services

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