

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2015 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

Senate Bill 96 (Senator Norman, *et al.*)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Election Law - Early Voting Centers - Parking

This bill requires that each early voting center have sufficient parking on-site to accommodate the maximum number of voters expected to be present at the early voting center at one time.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2015.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill does not directly affect State finances.

Local Effect: Local government expenditures may increase in some counties due to rental costs, or increased rental costs, for early voting centers. **This bill may impose a mandate on a unit of local government.**

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law/Background: Each early voting center must satisfy the State law requirements for polling places used on election day, which do not address parking availability. The State Board of Elections (SBE), in collaboration with the local board of elections in each county, must designate each early voting center in that county no later than six months before a primary election. SBE regulations require local boards to submit a form to SBE for each proposed early voting center, that includes, along with other information, whether the proposed early voting center has parking facilities sufficient for early voting, taking into consideration the normal business activities of the proposed early voting center.

See the **Appendix – Early and Absentee Voting** for additional information on early voting and early voting centers.

Local Fiscal Effect: Local government expenditures may increase in some counties to the extent rental costs, or increased rental costs, must be incurred for early voting center locations that meet the bill’s requirement when a less expensive or no-cost location would otherwise have been used by a local board of elections. Anne Arundel County, for example, indicates that if the bill requires the local board of elections to rent facilities in place of the four public libraries it used for four of its five early voting center locations in 2014, its annual costs increase by \$20,000, based on the \$5,000 rental cost for its fifth location in 2014. This assumes that such sites that meet the bill’s requirement and other requirements applicable to early voting centers are available to rent.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): State Board of Elections; Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Frederick, Montgomery, and Somerset counties; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 10, 2015
mar/hlb

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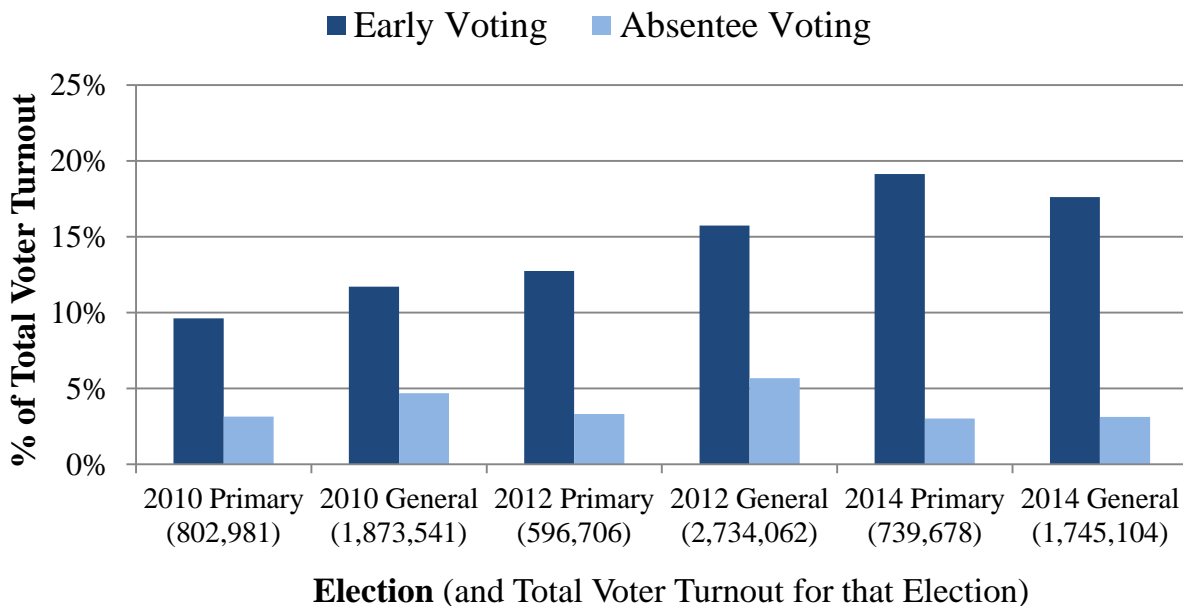
Appendix – Early and Absentee Voting

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 2014 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 and vote at an early voting center beginning 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 33 states and the District of Columbia offer in-person early voting, and 27 states and the District of Columbia permit no excuse absentee voting. In addition, 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, across the 33 states, 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, somewhere between the Thursday and the Monday before election day.

Exhibit 2
Early Voting Centers

Prior to Chs. 157/158		Under Chs. 157/158	
Registered Voters <u>in a County</u>	Early Voting <u>Centers</u>	Registered Voters <u>in a County</u>	Early Voting <u>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 2013)	Early Voting Centers in 2012	Early Voting Centers in the 2014 General Election*
Montgomery	625,030	5	9
Prince George's	567,823	5	8
Baltimore	512,686	5	8
Baltimore City	376,738	5	6
Anne Arundel	351,794	5	5
Howard	194,938	3	3
Harford	162,170	1	4
Frederick	147,538	1	3
Carroll	113,430	1	1
Charles	98,353	1	2
Washington	88,336	1	1
St. Mary's	64,148	1	1
Cecil	61,087	1	1
Calvert	59,606	1	1
Wicomico	58,216	1	1
Allegany	42,223	1	1
Worcester	36,758	1	1
Queen Anne's	32,278	1	2
Talbot	25,705	1	1
Dorchester	20,475	1	1
Garrett	19,001	1	1
Caroline	18,463	1	1
Somerset	13,160	1	1
Kent	12,652	1	1
Total	3,702,608	46	64

*There were 63 early voting centers for the 2014 primary election. One center was added, in Charles County, prior to the general election.