

Commission on Local Government

Estimate of Local Fiscal Impact

2016 General Assembly Session

Bill: SB 84

Patron: Favola

Date: 1/20/2016

In accordance with the provisions of §30-19.03 of the Code of Virginia, the staff of the Commission on Local Government offers the following analysis of the above-referenced legislation:

Bill Summary:

Absentee voting; postage prepaid on return envelope. Requires the envelope provided to the voter for the return of the absentee ballot to include prepaid postage.

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**Executive Summary:**

As described under the provision of SB 84, localities are required to send qualified absentee voters a properly addressed envelope with postage prepaid for the return of the ballot to the general registrar by mail or in person by the applicant.

Localities have evaluated a negative fiscal impact of \$350 - \$30,000. The provisions of the bill will affect all local governments. If the bill passes, the estimated fiscal impact to the localities would vary depending on the type of election, the number of elections in a given year, and the cost of postage at that time.

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**Local Analysis:**

**Locality:** City of Chesapeake

**Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$2,700.00

For each of the last two presidential elections, we have mailed approximately 5400 ballots to persons applying for absentee ballots. At the current 49 cent 1st class rate, the annual costs total \$2,646. During years when a presidential election is not held, we receive approximately 1200 requests annually. Prepaid postage for years when a presidential election is not scheduled costs approximately \$600.

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Locality: City of Danville

Estimated Fiscal Impact: \$2,000.00

According to our registrar's office, the amount will vary based on the type of election, with Presidential elections costing more than local elections. We estimate about \$1500-\$2000 for an annual election cycle.

Of note: Absentee by mail voting is increasing each election cycle and the cost of postage may also rise. Additionally, the return ballot for the to optical scan system may be over an ounce and that will increase cost per envelope. These factors must also be considered.

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**Locality:** City of Lynchburg **Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$2,500.00

Localities would need to reprint the envelopes with a business reply so there is a printing cost as well. An average of 2,500 vote by absentee ballot in Presidential elections so the estimate is based on larger elections.

**Locality:** City of Norfolk **Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$1,700.00

Should the proposed legislation pass, the estimated fiscal impact to the City of Norfolk would fluctuate depending on the type election, the number of elections in a given year, and the cost of postage at the time. Presidential Elections drive higher numbers of absentee voters versus local elections. A locality does not always know how many elections there will be for a given year. Primary Elections may be called by the parties and Special Elections may be called for a vacancy of office or referendum. The table below shows the impact to the City of Norfolk by type of election:

| Type of Election        | Absentee Ballots | Postage | Total Impact |
|-------------------------|------------------|---------|--------------|
| Presidential Elections: | 8,500            | \$0.49  | \$4,165      |
| General Elections:      | 1,200            | \$0.49  | \$588        |
| Special Elections:      | 200              | \$0.49  | \$98         |
| Primary Elections:      | 250              | \$0.49  | \$122        |

In any given year, the City of Norfolk has three elections with approximately 3,400 voters filling out absentee ballots. At the current postage rate of \$0.49, providing prepaid postage would cost the city approximately \$1,700.

**Locality:** City of Roanoke **Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$1,764.00

An estimated 3,600 absentee ballots can be cast in the City of Roanoke during the year of a Presidential Election. Envelopes are already purchased for this service. At a rate of \$0.49/stamp, it would cost approximately an additional \$1,764 to provide prepaid postage on envelopes for absentee voting.

**Locality:** City of Winchester **Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$2,060.00

Using our postage of \$2.06 for the required mailing times approx. 1,000 absentee voters (presidential year). We calculate an approximate number of \$2,060.

**Locality:** Fairfax County **Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$30,000.00

For the November 2016 presidential election, Fairfax County projects that it will mail 60,000 absentee ballots. At a cost of 49 cents per envelope, the fiscal impact would be about \$30,000 for that election.

**Locality:** Henrico County **Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$8,800.00

This estimate is based on an estimate of 20,000 purchased envelopes to include with ballots sent to absentee voters and a postage rate of \$0.44/envelope. This does not take into account ballots that are mailed overseas, for which the cost would increase dramatically.

**Locality:** King George County **Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$2,800.00

Voters should have to maintain some responsibility in the process, by doing this the locality would have the burden financially and the numbers could vary drastically depending on high volume elections. We currently have prepaid envelopes for military voters.

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Locality: Mecklenburg County **Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$445.00

We reviewed elections from 2011 to 2014. It varied from a low of 21 ballots in a primary to a high of 750 in presidential years. Cost ranged from \$160 to \$925. Average is \$445 with 21,500 registered voters.

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**Locality:** Prince George County **Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$588.00

The largest, most recent, impact would be the 2008 Presidential election. Approximately, 1,200 absentee mailings from Prince George County. Pre-paid return envelopes - cost would be  $\$0.49 \times 1,200 = \$588$ .

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Locality: Rappahannock County **Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$350.00

We had an average of 325 individual absentee ballots per year for each of the last two years. Fluctuates wildly if there are primaries and I included postage cost and provision of pre-printed self-addressed envelopes . No labor costs included.

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**Locality:** Spotsylvania County **Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$1,000.00

\$1,000 is the estimated maximum added expense resulting from this proposed legislation.

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Locality: Town of Boones Mill

Estimated Fiscal Impact: \$826.00

Towns do not maintain voter registrars. This impact falls on cities and counties.

I received some information from the county registrar here.

The formula would be: (Cost for self-addressed envelope)(number sent annually) using office data for number of absentee ballots sent out and number of absentee votes returned. I'd be curious how leaky this bucket is, what percentage of absentee requests come back as votes.

- 1. Postage rate you pay for a self-addressed envelope. .49 cents and \$7.95 if mailing 20 or more envelopes (regular mail). Absentee postage is currently .71 cents and we are required to include a certificate of mailing fee for each ballot which is .38 cents if you have more than three to mail. If it is less than three absentee to mail then the fee for certificate of mailing increases to a \$1.35 each.
- 2. Number of absentee ballot forms you sent out for several past elections. Four years would be ideal. 4,655 Applications received for four years. This total does not include the number that was mailed out by requests.
- 3. Number of absentee votes received. How much smaller is this number than point 2? 4,445 (Absentee ballot forms sent 4,655 – Absentee ballots received 4,445 = 210)
- 4. Confirm whether postage is a locally borne expense impacting the Franklin County budget. Local budget expense.

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