

Commission on Local Government

Estimate of Local Fiscal Impact

2021 General Assembly Session

Bill: HB1746

Special Session:

Patron: Cole

Date: 1/20/2021

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:

Conduct of elections; vote counting; required live video recording. Requires the general registrar of each county and city to provide for a live video recording of each polling place while absentee ballots are cast, votes are counted, and returns are completed, and of each central absentee precinct while ballots are handled and returns are completed. The general registrars are required to ensure the video coverage is recorded and retained until the deadline to request a recount has passed and, if any contest or recount is pending thereafter, until it has been concluded. The bill provides that each live video recording must include date and time indicators and be linked to the official website of the county or city. The Department of Elections is required to post links on its official website to the video coverage for viewing by the public. The bill provides that any disruption in video coverage shall not affect or prevent the continued casting of absentee ballots, counting of votes, or completion of returns, and is not grounds for an election contest.

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### Executive Summary:

Localities have evaluated a negative fiscal impact ranging from \$0.00 - \$1,000,000.00. A majority of localities responded with a cost, noted that the cost would be related to purchase and installation of cameras for surveillance system, laptops, internet connections, server storage, Firewall, additional staffing, and training. They also noted that there would be an ongoing maintenance cost to keep cameras in working condition, and cost for installation and removal of equipment from temporary polling places for each election. One locality noted that the live video feed would create unintended consequences regarding privacy and safety. Of those localities that responded with no cost, noted that the bill would not have any impact on them because they are towns, and the election is the responsibility of the county. Another locality that responded with no cost, noted that the cost of the bill is indeterminate but significant.

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### Local Analysis:

**Locality:** City of Danville

**Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$55,000.00

After consultation with the Registrar and Director of Information Technology, this bill potentially will cause about \$55,000 to implement. This includes the purchase and installation of additional cameras on our surveillance system, a person to manage the collection/retention of video, and administrative costs.

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Locality: City of Harrisonburg

Estimated Fiscal Impact: \$0.00

Unable to determine at this time the financial impact of this legislation. It would however be a significant investment in equipment and staff resources.

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**Locality:** City of Manassas

**Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$75,000.00

Our conservative estimate of the fiscal impact is a minimum of \$75,000. It will likely be more. This cost was derived based upon the estimated equipment needed to include cameras, laptops, internet connections, server storage, personnel, and training. As with many localities, the City does not own and control all of the spaces used for polling places. Therefore, these livestream feeds would have to set up and removed for each election, adding to the ongoing cost.

Currently, there are observers from the major political parties that observe the vote counting process. While a livestream video may be considered an effort to provide transparency to the vote counting process, the requirement that there is a live video feed the entire time absentee ballots are handled would create privacy concerns as many voters vote in person at the Central Absentee Precinct during the 45 days prior to the election. Having their image livestreamed and recorded while they are exercising their right to vote may create any number of unintended consequences regarding privacy and safety.

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**Locality:** City of Norfolk

**Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$1,000,000.00

The City of Norfolk has approximately 51 locations that would need temporary camera installations, the purchase, installation, removal from temporary polling places (schools and rec centers), and storage of temporary cameras would have a significant cost to the city's budget. An estimation of \$800,000 to \$1,000,000 in the first year for purchase, security installation, IT outfitting, and set-up; and \$100,000 to \$250,000 is estimated for out year maintenance, storage, installation, and miscellaneous needs to keep the cameras in working order.

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**Locality:** Mecklenburg County

**Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$8,000.00

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Live Video Recording

The cost of the camera (\$150), storage media (\$50), Hard Drive (100) and training the registrar and setup crew to upload and stream large data files from multiple locations. This would include downloading/uploading data from 24 polling locations around Mecklenburg and the Registrar's Office. We would have to have a person setup the cameras before the election, and remove them after the election is over (est cost \$125 per day). If there is an increase for storage on the official website there would be an added cost there as well. Not to mention the time and effort to load all this data to your localities website. Depending on internet speeds this could take as long as two weeks. This would limited other work you would be able to accomplish due to diminished network speed.

Cost:

Cameras: 200 x 25 = \$5,000

SD Card: 50 \* 25 = \$1,250

Hard Drive: \$100

Setup/Takedown Employee: \$250

Time to upload data cost: \$500

Website Upgrade: \$150

Total - \$7,100

OnGoing Costs:

Setup/Takedown Employee: \$250

Time to upload data cost: \$500

Website Upgrade: \$150

Total - \$900

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**Locality:** Pulaski County

**Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$81,200.00

\$15,000 onetime cost for hardware which includes Server and Firewall upgrades  
\$4,000 onetime software costs  
\$21,600 per year for additional bandwidth to handle the live streams that could happen  
  
\$19,000 onetime costs  
\$21,600 extra per year for increased bandwidth

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Locality: Town of Blacksburg

Estimated Fiscal Impact: \$0.00

The Town does not have responsibility for elections.

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**Locality:** Town of Marion.

**Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$0.00

This would be a tremendous expense in terms of equipment, staffing, and data storage - but the burden would be on the Commonwealth and on the County, not the Town, since Election functions are not in the Town's purview.

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Locality: Town of Scottsville

Estimated Fiscal Impact: \$0.00

Zero fiscal impact upon the Town of Scottsville, nor upon similarly situated small towns.

Election administration is at the county registrar's level, with only minimal funding support from the Town for our elections overhead costs. A video system might affect the county registrar's budget, but there would not likely be a fiscal impact to the Town.

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**Locality:** Wise County

**Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$1,500.00

Total estimate around \$1,500 at each video location.  
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