

Commission on Local Government

Estimate of Local Fiscal Impact

2021 General Assembly Session

Bill: HB1888

Special Session:

Patron: VanValkenburg

Date: 1/22/2021

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:

Absentee voting; procedural and process reforms; availability and accessibility reforms; penalty. Makes various reforms to absentee voting processes and procedures, including those related to availability and accessibility. The bill requires certain actions to be taken to process absentee ballots returned before the day of an election, including verifying the correct completion of the voter affirmation statement, and provides for an opportunity for an absentee voter to make corrections to the statement in certain circumstances. The bill requires the establishment of drop-off locations for the return of voted absentee ballots. Additionally, a central absentee voter precinct is required to be established in each locality; currently, establishment is optional. On the day of the election, officers of election are required to begin processing absentee ballots in the central absentee voter precincts prior to the close of polls, but no ballot vote counts are permitted to be transmitted outside of the central absentee voter precinct before the close of polls; a violation of such prohibition is a Class 1 misdemeanor. When reporting election results to the Department of Elections, the general registrars are required to report absentee ballots cast early in person separately from all other absentee ballots. Additionally, a voter who has applied for and received an absentee ballot may choose to instead vote at his polling place on election day, and such voter shall be entitled to cast a provisional ballot. The bill requires a ballot marking tool with screen reader assistive technology to be made available for absentee voters with a print disability. Restrictions on the availability of absentee voting for first-time voters who registered by mail are repealed. The bill contains technical amendments for organizational and readability purposes.

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### Executive Summary:

Localities have evaluated a negative fiscal impact ranging from \$0.00 - \$100,000.00. A majority of localities responded with a cost, noted that the cost would be related to additional staffing, secure containers, pre-paid postage, outside drop-box setup, video recording, and assistive technology for absentee voters with a print disability. Of those localities that responded with no cost, noted that the bill would not have any impact on them because they are in compliance with the provisions of the bill or they are towns and the election is the responsibility of the county. They also noted that the voting location outside of the registrar's office could have a small financial impact because it requires additional election officers to operate this location.

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### Local Analysis:

**Locality:** City of Danville

**Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$20,000.00

This estimate includes additional funds needed for staffing, secure containers, and pre-paid postage. During this previous election, the drop box was located inside the registrars office. If an outside drop-off box were mandated, the cost would increase by an additional about \$20,000 for secure box, set-up, and required 24/7 video recording for the drop-box.

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Locality: City of Harrisonburg

Estimated Fiscal Impact: \$0.00

From my reading of this bill I don't think the city will incur any substantial financial impact. I believe we meet most of standards set in this bill, or should be able to meet them. There is only one section of the language that is not clear to me "The bill requires the establishment of drop-off locations for the return of voted absentee ballots." Currently we use the registrars office as a ballot drop off location, if the bill means to have a location outside of the registrar's office there could be a small financial impact of having to staff additional election officers to operate this location.

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**Locality:** City of Manassas

**Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$6,000.00

The City of Manassas anticipates a fiscal impact of at least \$6,000 for prepaid return postage on absentee ballots. This is based upon the number of absentee ballot requests from the November 2020 General Election. Many of those requested either dropped off the ballots or decided to vote in person, which means the prepaid postage was not used. The City already has drop boxes to use at each polling place as well as the ADA-accessible voting equipment.

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Locality: City of Norfolk

Estimated Fiscal Impact: \$100,000.00

The estimate of \$100,000 is for man power and personnel costs to carry out the oversight of the absentee ballots as well as the cost of any assistive technology for absentee voters with a print disability.

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**Locality:** City of Winchester

**Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$500.00

Very minimal costs to the locality.

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Locality: Mecklenburg County

Estimated Fiscal Impact: \$52,870.00

Pre-Paid Postage

The pre-paid postage will depend on the post office, and the typical yearly increase that we see. At the current rate (.50) we paid \$1150.00 in return postage. That was for one election. We have already had 500+ people sign up for elections for the coming year. We will have a minimum of three elections that will appear this year. Not only do we have the cost of return postage, but the cost of mailing the ballot (.65), and the confirmation of mailing charge (.43 - 1.50). The cost per ballot sent would range from \$1.58 - \$2.65 depending on the amount of ballots mailed in a day. We had 2,300 ballot requests in the last election. This is an ongoing cost that is now borne by the locality instead of the voter.

Verifying Information on Envelope B is Correct and Complete, Give the voter opportunity to fix any errors (cure process)
The provisions of this will cause each registrar's office to hire a part time person every election. We will also have to have 2 paid officers of election (minimum) for the 7 days leading up to the election at \$15 per hour per person.

Drop-Off Locations for Absentee Ballots

There is no clear cut information of the location of the drop off box(s). If we are allowed to continue to have the ballot drop box inside our office to comply with security standards. Then the cost will be none as we already have secure boxes, for indoor use only. If you are required to place the box outside of our office with monitoring the cost will jump to \$6,000 plus a monthly security monitoring cost, and that is per drop box.

Establishing a CAP is a requirement

This should be done. However, there is an inherent cost associated with this ongoing and upfront. The minimum cost for a locality is one more voting machine. It should be 2 machines, because you always need a backup. The cost for our locality would be \$16,000. This is a one time upfront cost. Then you will have the ongoing cost of warranty and machine upkeep. This is 150+ per machine per year. You also have to pay the officers of election for every election. There is to be a minimum of three officers of election, however we use five. You would lastly need to buy pollbooks minimum of two.

General Registrar required to report early in-person separate from all other absentee

This will cause a locality to have multiple voting machines programmed for absentee voting. The minimum cost for a locality is one more voting machine. It should be 2 machines, because you always need a back

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**Locality:** Town of Blacksburg

**Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$0.00

The Town is not responsible for Elections. That is done at the County level.

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Locality: Town of Marion.

Estimated Fiscal Impact: \$0.00

Voting and associated functions are restricted to Commonwealth and Smyth County, so there is no direct cost to the Town.

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**Locality:** Town of Scottsville

**Estimated Fiscal Impact:** \$0.00

Zero fiscal impact to Town of Scottsville or similarly situated small towns.

Election administration and related costs are paid at the level of the county registrar.

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Locality: Wise County

Estimated Fiscal Impact: \$800.00

Fiscal impact of this bill would be less than \$1,000 annually for the pre-paid postage requirement.

Additionally, we anticipate some cost savings related to the in house production of materials for Absentee and In Person voting which would off set the impact.

My estimate would be that this bill would cost my office a total of \$800 dollars annually to administer.

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