

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
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FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 1048 (Senator Smith, *et al.*)
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Secure and Accessible Registration Act

This bill modifies provisions established under Chapter 287 of 2016 by changing “electronic voter registration agencies” designated under Chapter 287 to “automatic voter registration agencies” and redefining the “electronic voter registration systems” those agencies must establish as “automatic voter registration systems.” The State Board of Elections (SBE) must also work with the State Comptroller to provide individuals who file a tax return electronically the opportunity to register to vote through a link to the online voter registration system. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2019.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill can be implemented with existing resources.

Local Effect: Local government expenditures may increase for additional resources for local boards of elections, depending on the extent to which voter registration increases as a result of the bill.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary:

Automatic Voter Registration Agencies/Systems

The automatic voter registration agencies are the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA), the Maryland Health Benefit Exchange (MHBE), local departments of social services, and the Mobility Certification Office (MCO) in the Maryland Transit Administration.

The bill modifies the existing definition of an “electronic voter registration system” so that it instead defines an “automatic voter registration system.” The definition is modified so that the system, as an integral part of each applicable transaction at the agency, instead of offering an applicant the opportunity to register to vote or update a voter registration record, informs the applicant that the applicant will be registered to vote or have a voter registration record updated, if applicable, unless the applicant declines to register to vote or update a voter registration record or is determined not to be eligible to register to vote.

Remaining existing requirements for an “electronic voter registration system” are retained as requirements for an “automatic voter registration system” – specifically that it also inform the applicant (1) of the qualifications to register to vote; (2) that the applicant should not register if the applicant does not meet all the qualifications; (3) of the penalties for the submission of a false application; and (4) that voter registration is voluntary and neither registering nor declining to register to vote will in any way affect the availability of services or benefits. The system must require the signature of the applicant, subject to penalties for perjury, by which the applicant attests that the information provided by the applicant is true and that the applicant meets all the qualifications to become a registered voter, including U.S. citizenship.

Under existing provisions of State law generally prohibiting unlawful voter registration, the bill states that a person who unintentionally becomes registered to vote through an automatic voter registration system may not be considered to have violated the provisions prohibiting unlawful voter registration.

A requirement that MVA, MHBE, and MCO each implement an electronic voter registration system by July 1, 2017, is replaced with a requirement that those agencies each implement an automatic voter registration system by July 1, 2019. A requirement that local departments of social services implement an electronic voter registration system by December 1, 2019, is replaced with a requirement that local departments of social services implement an automatic voter registration system by the same date, December 1, 2019.

Other existing provisions applicable to an electronic voter registration system and electronic voter registration agencies are generally retained and made applicable to an automatic voter registration system and automatic voter registration agencies. The bill adds that voter registration information may not be used for any purpose other than the maintenance of registration statistics, election administration, or prosecution of criminal violations of the election law.

A person acting under color of law is prohibited from discriminating against an individual based on the individual's declination to register to vote or voter registration information.

Link to Online Voter Registration System

SBE and the State Comptroller must jointly develop and implement procedures for individuals who file a Maryland resident individual income tax return electronically to be offered the opportunity to register to vote through a link to SBE's online voter registration system.

Current Law: Chapter 287 of 2016, among other things, designates MVA, MHBE, local departments of social services, and MCO as "electronic voter registration agencies" and requires each to implement an electronic voter registration system. MVA, MHBE, and MCO must implement such a system by July 1, 2017, and local departments of social services must implement a system by December 1, 2019. An electronic voter registration system is generally a system that allows an individual to register to vote or update a voter registration record during an "applicable transaction" at the agency and electronically transmits the voter registration information of the individual directly to SBE within five days of the transaction. "Applicable transaction" is specifically defined for each agency. At local departments of social services, for example, an "applicable transaction" is an initial application for a State or federally funded public assistance program or an application for a recertification, renewal, or change of name or address relating to a State or federally funded public assistance program.

An agent of any of the applicable agencies is prohibited from specified actions relating to influencing an applicant's political preference, party registration, or decision whether or not to register to vote.

Information relating to the decision of an applicant at an agency to decline to register to vote may not be used for any purpose other than the maintenance of registration statistics. The identity of an agency through which a particular voter has registered may not be disclosed to the public.

Background: See [*Issue Papers, 2018 Legislative Session*](#), Department of Legislative Services, pgs. 222-223 ("Automatic Voter Registration") (November 2017).

State Fiscal Effect: MVA indicates that it can implement the bill with existing resources and while other agencies have indicated they will incur costs to implement the bill (MHBE – \$70,000; Department of Human Services (DHS) (local departments of social services) – \$45,000; MCO – \$25,000), the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) disagrees and advises that the bill can also be implemented with existing resources by MHBE, DHS, and MCO. While the bill changes the way that the opportunity to register to vote is presented to an applicant for services (effectively, stating that the applicant will go through the voter registration process unless they decline, instead of offering the applicant the opportunity to go through the registration process) it does not otherwise materially change the voter registration system required to be established by those agencies under current law.

Any costs to offer individuals who file a resident income tax return electronically the opportunity to register to vote through a link to the online voter registration system are assumed to be absorbable by the Comptroller's Office within existing resources. The Comptroller's Office indicates it incurs costs of \$37,000 to implement the requirement, but DLS disagrees.

Local Fiscal Effect: Local government expenditures may increase for the local boards of elections to process additional voter registration applications resulting from the bill. A local board of elections is responsible for processing voter registration applications for individuals that reside in the county of the local board of elections. It is uncertain, however, to what extent the bill results in an increase in the overall voter registration workload for local boards of elections and, therefore, to what extent additional resources may be needed.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 741 of 2017 received a hearing in the House Ways and Means Committee, but no further action was taken.

Cross File: Although HB 152 (Delegate Luedtke, *et al.* - Ways and Means) is designated as a cross file, it is not identical.

Information Source(s): State Board of Elections; Maryland Health Benefit Exchange; Department of Human Services; Maryland Department of Transportation; Comptroller's Office; Kent, Montgomery, Prince George's, Washington, and Worcester counties; Department of Legislative Services

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