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# OHIO LEGISLATIVE SERVICE COMMISSION

Office of Research  
and Drafting

Legislative Budget  
Office

H.B. 546  
135<sup>th</sup> General Assembly

## Fiscal Note & Local Impact Statement

[Click here for H.B. 546's Bill Analysis](#)

**Version:** As Introduced

**Primary Sponsor:** Rep. Gross

**Local Impact Statement Procedure Required:** No

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### Highlights

- County boards of elections (BOEs) will incur between \$1.6 million and \$4.5 million statewide in setup costs and between 2.3¢ and 5.2¢ per ballot to create each unique watermark.
- The cost to affix a unique watermark to each ballot is uncertain. These unique watermarks can be applied either by hand or in coordination with the ballot manufacturer. The former would require additional staffing costs and the latter, additional manufacturing costs.
- BOEs will need to hire additional staff to validate the watermark on each ballot.

### Detailed Analysis

Based on a quote from an Ohio manufacturer, county boards of elections (BOEs) will incur between \$1.6 million and \$4.5 million in statewide setup costs and ongoing costs between 2.3¢ and 5.2¢ per ballot to create each unique watermark. Additionally these unique watermarks will need to be affixed to each ballot, resulting in further costs to BOEs. This could either be done (1) by hand with increased staffing costs, or (2) during the ballot manufacturing process, also at an increased cost. The costs involved with either of these two options, however, is uncertain. Additionally, BOEs will need to hire additional staff to validate the watermark on each ballot after votes have been cast. In total, there were 1.7 million ballots counted in the 2022 primary election and 4.2 million ballots counted during the 2022 general election. During the 2020 election cycle, there were 1.8 million votes counted in the primary election and just under 6.0 million counted in the general election.

The bill requires each ballot to have a watermark. Under the bill, a watermark is defined as a “unique, randomly assigned identifying image, pattern, or alphanumeric code that is placed upon, or embedded within, a paper ballot, that is not visible to the unassisted human eye, and

that becomes visible to election officials through the use of an alternate light source or other technology.” To meet the specifications of this requirement, LBO received a quote for custom holographic stickers with florescent ink serial numbers. The design would be tamperproof and registered with the International Hologram Manufacturers Association to avoid counterfeits.