



www.lsc.ohio.gov

OHIO LEGISLATIVE SERVICE COMMISSION

Office of Research
and Drafting

Legislative Budget
Office

S.B. 294
133rd General Assembly

Fiscal Note & Local Impact Statement

[Click here for S.B. 294's Bill Analysis](#)

Version: As Introduced

Primary Sponsor: Sen. M. Huffman

Local Impact Statement Procedure Required: No

Terry Steele, Senior Budget Analyst

Highlights

- The bill provides a \$5.0 million appropriation to the Secretary of State, under appropriation item 050627, Absent Voter's Ballot Application Mailing. To facilitate this appropriation, the bill transfers \$5.0 million from the Emergency Purposes/Contingencies Fund (Fund 5KM0) to the Absent Voter's Ballot Application Mailing Fund (Fund 5RG0).
- Expanding the absent voter period for the March 17, 2020 primary election to April 28, 2020 would result in an increase in ballot mailing costs to county boards of elections, which would be offset through a reduction in precinct staffing and operations costs for in-person voting.
- The bill requires the Secretary of State to mail postcards to every registered voter explaining the procedures for applying and submitting an absent voter's ballot. The overall costs are unclear, however, mailing absent voter ballot applications to all registered voters in 2018 cost the Secretary of State just over \$1.3 million.
- The bill requires the Secretary of State to reimburse county boards of elections for return postage on all absent voter ballots submitted for this primary election. These reimbursement costs could exceed \$2.8 million, depending on return postage costs and voter participation.

Detailed Analysis

Primary election modifications

The bill modifies election law by expanding the absent voter period for the March 17, 2020 primary election until April 28, 2020. Overall, the provisions of the bill will result in increased costs to the Secretary of State's (SOS) Office, as well as county boards of elections. However, with respect to county boards of elections, those costs would be offset

through required reimbursements from the SOS, as well as election cost savings resulting from no longer operating voting precincts for the primary election. The bill appropriates \$5.0 million to the Secretary of State in FY 2020 to pay these costs. This appropriation comes from a \$5.0 million cash transfer from the Emergency Purposes/Contingencies Fund (Fund 5KM0), used by the Controlling Board to the Absent Voter's Ballot Application Mailing Fund (Fund 5RGO), used by the SOS. These provisions and the related costs are discussed in greater detail below.

Secretary of State reimbursements and mailings

The bill requires the SOS to reimburse county boards of elections for the return postage costs of all absent voter ballots. The cost of doing so would ultimately depend on how many such ballots were sent in that particular county, and the cost of the required return postage. During the 2018 general election, the return postage cost for an absent voter's ballot ranged from 50¢ to 71¢. Because the primary ballot for this election is generally smaller than the 2018 general election ballot, the return postage per ballot would likely fall on the lower end of this postage cost range for most counties. Given such, if it is assumed that voter participation matches that of the 2016 primary election of over 3.0 million total votes, these reimbursement costs would range from \$1.5 million to slightly more than \$2.1 million. However, if voter turnout matches that of the 2018 general election, the total return postage costs could reach as high as \$2.8 million.

The bill requires the SOS to mail a postcard to all registered voters in the state indicating how the voter may obtain an absent voter ballot application, the procedures and deadlines to apply for those ballots, and the procedures and deadlines to return those absent voter ballots to the applicable county board of elections. There are approximately 8.0 million registered voters in Ohio. The cost of mailing this postcard is not clear. However, the SOS spent slightly less than \$1.4 million to mail absent voter ballot applications to all registered voters for the 2018 general election. It can be assumed that the mailing of a postcard as required by the bill, instead of the application, would result in a cost below the \$1.4 million spent previously.

County boards of elections

County boards of elections would experience both cost increases and cost decreases associated with the bill. The bill would result in cost increases to county boards of elections primarily related to postage costs. The boards would have to mail a far larger number of absent voter ballots than would generally occur during a standard election. As an example, during the 2016 primary election, there were approximately 285,000 absent voter's ballots cast by mail, while the total voter turnout was just over 3.3 million. Therefore, the postage costs associated with mailing these additional ballots would be substantially higher than during a typical election.

While county boards of elections would experience an increase in mailing costs for sending out absent voter ballots, presumably, these costs would be offset through a reduction in costs associated with the operation of voting precincts and the payment of precinct election officials. During the 2018 general election, there were approximately 8,900 total precincts operated by county boards of elections. Counties are required to have either two or four poll workers per precinct depending on different factors. Ultimately, it would appear as though county boards of elections would experience a net cost savings under the bill.