

Fiscal Estimate - 2023 Session

Original
 Updated
 Corrected
 Supplemental

LRB Number 23-3863/1	Introduction Number SB-0379
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Description
 requiring a watermark on mailed absentee ballots

Fiscal Effect

State:

<input type="checkbox"/> No State Fiscal Effect	<input type="checkbox"/> Increase Existing Revenues	<input type="checkbox"/> Increase Costs - May be possible to absorb within agency's budget <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Indeterminate	<input type="checkbox"/> Decrease Existing Revenues	
<input type="checkbox"/> Increase Existing Appropriations	<input type="checkbox"/> Decrease Existing Appropriations	<input type="checkbox"/> Decrease Costs
<input type="checkbox"/> Create New Appropriations		

Local:

<input type="checkbox"/> No Local Government Costs		
<input type="checkbox"/> Indeterminate	5. Types of Local Government Units Affected	
1. <input type="checkbox"/> Increase Costs	3. <input type="checkbox"/> Increase Revenue	<input type="checkbox"/> Towns <input type="checkbox"/> Village <input type="checkbox"/> Cities
<input type="checkbox"/> Permissive <input type="checkbox"/> Mandatory	<input type="checkbox"/> Permissive <input type="checkbox"/> Mandatory	<input type="checkbox"/> Counties <input type="checkbox"/> Others
2. <input type="checkbox"/> Decrease Costs	4. <input type="checkbox"/> Decrease Revenue	<input type="checkbox"/> School Districts <input type="checkbox"/> WTCS Districts
<input type="checkbox"/> Permissive <input type="checkbox"/> Mandatory	<input type="checkbox"/> Permissive <input type="checkbox"/> Mandatory	

Fund Sources Affected	Affected Ch. 20 Appropriations
<input type="checkbox"/> GPR <input type="checkbox"/> FED <input type="checkbox"/> PRO <input type="checkbox"/> PRS <input type="checkbox"/> SEG <input type="checkbox"/> SEGS	

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Fiscal Estimate Narratives

ELEC 10/3/2023

LRB Number	23-3863/1	Introduction Number	SB-0379	Estimate Type	Original
Description requiring a watermark on mailed absentee ballots					

Assumptions Used in Arriving at Fiscal Estimate

The fiscal effect of this bill cannot be determined without further information defining "watermark."

There appear to be at least three common definitions of watermark. Watermark may mean a textured mark imprinted or embossed upon some types of paper during its production that can only be seen if it is held against the light. There are different technical processes that may be employed to produce the mark. This is the most complex and costly version of a watermark. Alternatively, a watermark may also mean a subtle or faint design printed on the paper during manufacturing. Finally, some watermarks may be applied after manufacturing during the print process (as in a Microsoft Word document watermark) or with a stamp. The cost and complexity of these three watermark types varies greatly.

Regardless of the type of watermark applied, the bill would almost certainly result in significantly higher costs for local officials. In Wisconsin, ballots are printed by counties and municipalities using locally selected vendors. These vendors each have their own pricing structure and technical capabilities that may or may not be capable of producing all the watermark types described above. The Wisconsin Elections Commission does not print ballots. Absentee ballot volume also varies considerably between elections and jurisdictions, so it is extremely difficult to predict absentee ballot volume with any accuracy. There are not currently different types of ballots for absentee and election day voting.

The bill provides no guidance on what, if anything, local election officials must do with the watermarks. This determination could significantly impact costs for local jurisdictions if additional staff time or required supplies are required to process absentee ballots. For example, absentee ballots currently remain sealed inside the certificate envelope until election day, and all requirements related to the integrity of the ballot are associated with the certificate envelope. It is the certificate envelope that validates the legitimacy of the ballot sealed within. Once the certificate envelope is determined to be sufficient, the ballot is unsealed and counted in the same manner as ballots cast in person at a polling place. The absentee and non-absentee ballots are not distinguished in any way. It appears that this bill intends that absentee ballots should be treated differently than other ballots, but the intent is unclear.

Long-Range Fiscal Implications

Unknown