

Fiscal Estimate - 2021 Session

Original
 Updated
 Corrected
 Supplemental

LRB Number 21-5959/1	Introduction Number SB-939
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Description
 absentee ballot applications, unsolicited mailing or transmission of absentee ballot applications and absentee ballots, secure delivery of absentee ballots, canvassing absentee ballots, voter registration requirements, electronic voter registration, and providing a penalty

Fiscal Effect

State:

<input type="checkbox"/> No State Fiscal Effect	<input type="checkbox"/> Increase Existing Revenues	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Increase Costs - May be possible to absorb within agency's budget <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" 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	3. <input type="checkbox"/> Increase Revenue	5. Types of Local Government Units Affected <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Towns <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Village <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cities <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Counties <input type="checkbox"/> Others <input type="checkbox"/> School Districts <input type="checkbox"/> WTCS Districts
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Indeterminate	<input type="checkbox"/> Permissive <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mandatory	
1. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Increase Costs	<input type="checkbox"/> Permissive <input type="checkbox"/> Mandatory	
<input type="checkbox"/> Permissive <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mandatory	<input type="checkbox"/> Permissive <input type="checkbox"/> Mandatory	
2. <input type="checkbox"/> Decrease Costs	4. <input type="checkbox"/> Decrease Revenue	
<input type="checkbox"/> Permissive <input type="checkbox"/> Mandatory	<input type="checkbox"/> Permissive <input type="checkbox"/> Mandatory	

Fund Sources Affected	Affected Ch. 20 Appropriations
<input checked="" 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 2/9/2022

LRB Number	21-5959/1	Introduction Number	SB-939	Estimate Type	Original
Description absentee ballot applications, unsolicited mailing or transmission of absentee ballot applications and absentee ballots, secure delivery of absentee ballots, canvassing absentee ballots, voter registration requirements, electronic voter registration, and providing a penalty					

Assumptions Used in Arriving at Fiscal Estimate

This bill continues numerous changes and additions to election law, several of which contain additional costs for state and local election officials and some which do not. The provisions that contain a fiscal component are outlined as part of this estimate, while ones that are not discussed should be assumed to either carry no fiscal impact or their costs can be absorbed into the existing WEC budget and functions.

Separate Absentee Ballot Applications and Certificates

In preparation of this fiscal estimate, WEC staff reviewed costs associated with the development of a new absentee envelope, removing the language that states it may also act as a ballot application. Updating and redesigning forms fall within the normal scope of staff duties and finalizing an updated version of each would require approximately 60 staff hours with a total of 120 hours for both. As previously stated, these 120 hours would be considered routine staff activity and would not require additional project time to be allocated.

A larger fiscal impact would fall upon the municipalities. The proposed legislation would require that existing stock of both the absentee application and the certificate envelope be replaced with the updated versions, which would incur significant printing costs. Per staff research and depending on whether a municipality prints in-house or contracts with a private vendor, the cost to print a two-sided, single page form will typically range between \$0.10 and \$0.25.

It is unknown how many blank applications clerks maintain in their offices to provide to voters who may request them by mail or by other means and this number obviously varies by municipality. However, as the proposed legislation would require voters participating in in-person absentee voting (IPAV) to also complete an application when voting in the clerk's office or approved alternate site and given that approximately 600,000 voters participate in IPAV in a General Election year, the minimum cost of printing applications for voters would range between \$60,000 and \$150,000 statewide. Using the historical estimate of 600,000 total IPAV voters for elections in a year with a General Election, the total printing costs for municipalities would be \$102,000 for absentee applications across the state.

The cost to print new certificate envelopes is also variable, as municipalities are generally unable to print or prepare absentee envelopes in their own offices and will typically contract through a printing vendor to obtain new stock. An additional consideration is that the absentee voting process requires two envelopes, a larger transmission envelope that the clerk sends to the voter with all the requisite materials to vote and a smaller return envelope that the voter uses to return their ballot. The proposed legislation would not affect the transmission envelope and municipalities would be able to use their existing stock and reorder as normal. The proposed legislation would only affect the return envelope which currently functions, during in-person absentee voting, as both the absentee application and certificate. If existing stock could not be altered to reflect the required language changes on the envelope, municipalities would have to replace it with new compliant envelopes.

While staff were able to identify the cost to print new envelopes, the applicability of this figure toward estimating the financial impact at the municipal level is less clear. Any required changes to the current version of the envelope that would require the replacement of existing stock would obviously incur costs which would vary based on the amount of envelope stock each municipality needed to replace. The estimated printing cost for replacement envelopes would be \$95.00 per 1,000 pieces.

If no stock needed to be replaced with an updated envelope and clerks would be able to implement the new version in their normal procurement processes, i.e., on a rolling basis or as needed, any costs would fall within normal budgetary considerations and would not result in an additional financial impact to the municipality.

Included in the fiscal review as well is the cost associated with the IPAV process taking longer to complete due to the application requirement. WEC contacted several municipalities in preparation of this estimate and these

local election officials indicated they would not be able to accommodate the application requirement, especially for high turnout general elections, without offering either more IPAV voting hours or hiring more staff during the hours they have regularly offered. On average, clerks across the state offer 28.5 hours of IPAV in the two weeks leading up to an election. Local election officials have indicated the extended time it would take for voters to fill out another form for an absentee request will require an increase in staffing locations already offering the maximum number of hours and an increase in hours for those who are not. For reference, there are 1,850 municipalities in Wisconsin with 2,015 IPAV locations in regular use.

If a municipality needed to hire additional staff to manage IPAV prior to each election it would cost them approximately \$425.00 per each added staff person ($\$15/\text{hour per staff person} \times 28.5 \text{ hours} = \427.50). It is unknown how many municipalities statewide would require additional staffing but if one third of all municipalities required at least one additional staff person for their 28.5 IPAV hours it would cost these 672 municipalities an additional \$287,280.00 for each election ($\$427.50 \times 672 \text{ municipalities} = \$287,280.00$).

Removal of Calendar Year Request Option for Most Voters

The proposed legislation also removes the option for all voters to place a calendar year request as a part of their applications for absentee ballots. Every absentee ballot application has to be processed by the municipal clerk's office or their data entry provider, which is usually the county clerk's office. If the voter submits the request through MyVote, the clerk has to verify the information in WisVote before preparing and sending the ballot. If it is submitted on paper, the clerk must find the voter in WisVote and then go through the steps to verify the information, enter the application, and prepare and send the ballot. On average, this process takes 2 minutes per voter. Currently, a local election official would only have to data enter a calendar year request one time in the WisVote system and the system will automatically generate the application record for each applicable election in that calendar year.

Removing the calendar year request option for all voters means that clerks will have to enter an estimated average of 30,000 absentee ballot applications for each election after the initial election when the calendar year request was received. The increase in the data entry requirements due to the elimination of calendar year absentee requests would mean an additional hour of staff time for every 30 applications received. Each additional staff hour would cost a municipality roughly \$15.00 to complete this data entry and the total additional costs required by this change would depend on the number of additional applications received that needed to be data entered. Based on this estimate every 100 additional applications that required data entry would cost the municipality required to process them \$50.00 in staff costs. Municipalities who contract with a third party entity, such as their county clerk, to complete data entry on their behalf may see additional charges from their provider due to the increase in data entry.

Online Voter Registration – Electronic Signature Extract

This bill will require the Commission to maintain a version of a completed voter registration form that contains the voter's electronic signature if the voter utilizes electronic voter registration through the Commission's MyVote Wisconsin website. The electronic signature would be obtained from the Department of Transportation database and inserted on a version of the voter's registration application maintained by the Commission.

We estimate costs occurring in two areas: 1) significant increase in storage costs of the voter application containing an electronic signature, 2) software application development costs to create a version of the voter application that will include an electronic signature obtained from the Department of Transportation-DMV database.

Storage costs: The statewide voter registration system stores data and is not currently designed as a document storage system. Adding a new stand-alone form generated at the time of registration that pulls in personally identifiable information (date of birth, DL number, last four digits of SSN, digital signature) and stores that form within the system for millions of records would likely double the amount of storage currently needed for the system to function efficiently. Costs will vary depending on the final design of the system and whether a stand along document must be stored and associated with a voter's current record or if a voter registration form could be created on demand using data that was obtained at the time of registration and then placed in fields when the application is needed.

Software application development costs: Regardless of the method used to create a new voter registration form that pulls in the electronic signature maintained by the Department of Transportation, software application development is needed to modify the current structure of the system to account for this new functionality. While some costs like project management could likely be absorbed into the Commission's current budget, there would be contracted developer time needed to develop and test the new functionality needed and ensure a secure transfer of the data into the WisVote system.

Due to the short turn-around time to prepare this estimate, costs are indeterminate at this time however it should be noted that data and server storage and software application developer time are real costs that are

traditionally significant.

Long-Range Fiscal Implications