OHIO LEGISLATIVE SERVICE COMMISSION

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Office of Research
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Legislative Budget
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H.B. 540
133rd General Assembly

Fiscal Note &
Local Impact Statement

Click here for H.B. 540's Bill Analysis

Version: As Introduced

Primary Sponsor: Rep. G. Manning

Local Impact Statement Procedure Required: No

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Highlights

- The extent of any information technology-related cost increases for the Secretary of State (SOS) to implement the Automated Voter Registration and Verification System is unknown. However, for comparison, LBO examined the cost estimates from the 20 states (the state of Washington in particular) that have enacted some similar version of an automated voter registration program.

- Allowing people to register to vote or modify a registration when interacting with the Bureau of Motor Vehicles will increase the number of transactions processed at these locations. While it can reasonably be expected that the number of voter registrations or registration changes would increase, the total magnitude of this increase is unclear.

- Even though the bill would result in cost increases for the SOS, the Department of Public Safety (DPS), and county boards of elections, there would also be some offsetting cost savings realized through the efficiencies of the voter registration and registration update process under the bill.

Detailed Analysis

Automated Voter Registration and Verification System

The bill creates the Automated Voter Registration and Verification System, which will be administered by the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State (SOS) would experience an increase in information technology (IT) costs in order to implement this new system. As of this writing, the SOS is uncertain as to how much it would cost to implement this system, and is currently working with the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) to determine the scope of the project and ultimately the cost to the agency. The Automated Voter Registration and Verification System established under the bill would create a system by which eligible voters could be registered to vote, or modify existing voter registrations using information from the BMV.

Currently, the SOS generally collects the information required by the bill during the voter registration process. This information is housed within the Statewide Voter Registration Database (SVRD). The costs of maintaining the SVRD are paid from the Business Services Fund (Fund 5990) appropriation item 050629, Statewide Voter Registration Database. Any cost increases resulting from implementing this system would likely be paid from this appropriation item.

The bill could affect the volume of voter registrations and updates in different ways. It is possible that the SOS could see a potential increase in voter registration workload as a result of the bill. However, it is also quite likely that individuals that would have otherwise registered to vote or change voter registration status with the SOS or county board of elections would do so at the BMV under the bill. In this case, they would be substituting one way of registering or updating for another. Overall, there are approximately 8.0 million registered voters in Ohio as of this writing.

Similar systems in other states

Because a cost estimate for Ohio to develop the Automated Voter Registration and Verification Program is not available, LBO examined the costs of implementing similar automated voter registration programs in other states. As of this writing, there are 20 states that have some form of automated voter registration where citizens are given the choice to be electronically registered or modify registrations at the same time they do business with a government office (typically the BMV), having their voter registration information digitally transmitted to the appropriate elections office.

In FY 2018, the state of Washington implemented a similar program, although more expansive, to the one proposed in the bill. The legislation creating the program also required the state to undertake a series of studies related to its implementation.[1] Overall, the estimated statewide IT costs were projected to be $280,000.[2] The agencies participating in automatic voter registration as required under the Washington legislation were the BMV, the Health Benefit Exchange, and any other state agencies approved by the Governor.

Potential cost savings

As a result of the bill, it is possible that many voter registrations, or modifications to existing registrations, may be completed at a BMV through this new system. This could result in fewer such new registrations or registration changes occurring through county boards of elections. Therefore, it is possible that local boards of elections would see a decrease in such costs under the bill. County boards of elections would simply be responsible for maintaining updated voter registration lists using the registration data provided by the SOS. It is also possible that under the methods provided in the bill, there will be fewer input mistakes in registration data, thereby lowering these costs further for both the SOS and county boards of elections.

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[1] http://lawfilesext.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2017-18/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/2595-S2.SL.pdf.

[2] https://fortress.wa.gov/ofm/fnspublic/FNSPublicSearch/Search/bill/2595/65.