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H.B. 577
136th General Assembly

Fiscal Note & Local Impact Statement

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Version: As Introduced

Primary Sponsor: Rep. Ferguson

Local Impact Statement Procedure Required: Yes

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Highlights

- County boards of elections (BOEs) and the Secretary of State (SOS) will incur costs to update materials, databases, and forms to comply with state election procedures and to train staff.
- Additionally, BOEs may incur additional costs for notices when absentee voters do not comply with requirements established in the bill.
- SOS will incur additional information technology costs to permanently store and maintain daily snapshots of voter registration records. Those costs would be paid from Fund 5990 appropriation line item (ALI) 050629, Statewide Voter Registration Database.
- The Department of Public Safety may incur additional costs to expand their BMV homebound identification (ID) program to provide state ID cards to individuals who are unable to travel due to confinement. This program is supported under Fund 5TMO ALI 762321, Operating Expense – BMV.
- Government entities that are currently required to distribute voter registration forms would, under the bill, need to provide free copies of photo IDs for absentee voting by mail. These entities would incur administrative costs which depend on the number of requests made.

Detailed Analysis

Overview

The bill makes various changes to election law including absentee voter identification (ID) verification, online voter registration, and public access to the Statewide Voter Registration

Database (SWVRD). These changes are detailed in the LSC bill analysis. Provisions of the bill are described below with their anticipated fiscal effects.

County boards of elections

Under the bill, county boards of elections (BOEs) will incur costs to update materials, databases, and forms to comply with state election procedures and to train staff. Specifically, the bill requires a person who votes by mail to include a copy of the voter's photo ID with the voted ballot when returning it to a BOE, unless the voter has a sincere religious objection to being photographed. Further, the bill requires the Secretary of State (SOS) to develop procedures for the SOS and the BOEs to store and dispose of electronic files and physical documents that contain electors' confidential information to prevent disclosure to the public.

BOEs will likely incur costs based on the number of additional notices and staff hours when an absentee voter fails to provide their photo ID or affidavit when attempting to cast their ballot by mail or the BOE's drop box. The voter must provide their missing ID or affidavit by the fourth day after the election for the ballot to be counted.

Additionally, when a bipartisan team of election officials personally delivers an absentee ballot to a voter who is unable to vote in person because of a disability or confinement, the bill requires the BOE to ensure that the officials have appropriate equipment with them to make a copy of the voter's ID and include it with the ballot.

Finally, BOEs would need to ensure each business day that daily snapshots of their voter registration records are sent to the SOS for archiving. Existing law requires the boards to do so only during the period beginning 46 days before an election and ending 81 days after the election.

Secretary of State

Under the bill, the SOS will also incur costs to update materials, databases, and forms to comply with state election procedures and to train staff. These updates include the absentee voter photo ID requirements and the development of procedures for the safe storage and disposal of confidential information of electors as discussed above. Additionally, the bill requires the SOS to modify Ohio's current online voter registration system to require an applicant to create a secure online account, using multifactor authentication, and verify the applicant's identity before submitting a voter registration form. The bill also expands the information that is available to the public on the SWVRD website to include all information in the SWVRD that is not explicitly required by law to be kept confidential which makes two additional data fields available to the public: (1) the image of the elector's signature and (2) whether the elector is required to cast a provisional ballot and, if so, the reason and the instructions for the elector to resolve the issue and cast a regular ballot.

As noted above, the bill expands a current requirement that BOEs create daily snapshots of their voter registration records and send them to the SOS for archiving. As a result of this change in procedure, the SOS may incur additional IT costs to store and maintain this information.

Additional costs to the SOS would likely be absorbed across several SOS appropriations. Appropriations for Fund 5990 appropriation line item (ALI) 050630, Election Support Supplement, total \$4.5 million in FY 2027, the approaching new fiscal year. This funding is used for administering elections, including the salaries of the Elections Division. The SWVRD is supported by a \$730,000 appropriation in FY 2027 under Fund 5990 ALI 050629, Statewide Voter Registration

Database. This ALI is used to support the numerous functions related to the SWVRD, such as maintaining the communication lines between SWVRD and 88 county BOEs as well as IT hardware and software maintenance support for the system. In FY 2027, GRF ALI 050321, Operating Expenses, is appropriated \$3.5 million to support cybersecurity measures throughout the SOS's Office. This includes the salaries of the Chief Information Officer and Chief Information Security Officer. Reimbursements to county BOEs for any required post-election audits are also made from this ALI.

Department of Public Safety

The bill would expand the homebound identification program under the Department of Public Safety (DPS), which may incur additional staffing and supplies costs to meet any additional demand. The current program provides state ID cards to individuals who are unable to travel to a deputy registrar office because of a medical condition or disability. The bill would add individuals who are unable to travel due to confinement. This program is funded under Fund 5TM0 ALI 762321, Operating Expense – BMV, which is used to pay for the BMV's operating expenses, the manufacture and distribution of license plates and stickers, the issuance of motor vehicle registrations, and the production and issuance of driver licenses and state identification cards, including the costs of supplying and maintaining systems at 182 deputy registrar locations and 56 BMV Express Kiosks statewide. This fund consists of various taxes, fees, and fines related to the registration and operation of vehicles on public highways.

Additionally, as discussed below, the Registrar of Motor Vehicles and BMV deputy registrars would be required to provide a free copy of a photo ID for absentee voting purposes. The Registrar is required to provide the appropriate equipment to each deputy registrar to make the copies. Any additional equipment needed would presumably be funded under Fund 5TM0 ALI 762321.

Free copy of photo ID

The bill requires certain government entities, upon request, to provide an elector a free copy of the elector's photo ID for absent voting purposes. The cost to these entities would depend on the number of electors that request a copy of their ID. In the November 2024 general election, nearly 1.15 million absentee by mail ballots were requested and nearly 1.08 million of these ballots were returned. The entities specified by the bill are currently required to distribute voter registration forms and include: the SOS or a BOE, the Registrar of Motor Vehicles and BMV deputy registrars, public libraries which must already provide free copies of some eligible forms of voter ID, the Department of Job and Family Services, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Department of Developmental Disabilities, the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Agency, public high schools and vocational schools, and county treasurer's offices.