
Detailed Fiscal Analysis

Current Ohio law (Section 3505.11) requires that a board of elections provide ballots to each voting precinct so that the number of ballots provided is equal to 101% of the **total precinct registration**. This bill permits a county to provide ballots to each precinct so the number equals 105% of the total **votes actually cast** in the last comparable election.

For example, suppose a precinct has 150 registered voters but only 100 votes were cast in the last presidential election in a particular precinct. Under the bill, the county board of elections would only have to provide 105 ballots to that precinct at the next presidential election instead of 151 required by current law. However, the board of elections is required under the bill to have the ability to provide more ballots to a precinct if the initial amount provided is determined not to be sufficient to allow all electors who want to vote to do so. This is commonly referred to as providing ballots “on demand”. Providing ballots on demand would involve a type of computer software that permits the county boards of elections to print out ballots as needed, as opposed to paying a private business to print out all the ballots before Election Day.

In order to estimate the fiscal effects of the bill, the LBO sent out a survey to all county boards of elections. The survey asked each board to estimate what its cost savings, if any, would have been in 1996 and 1997 if the minimum number of ballots required by law were reduced as indicated in the bill. Forty county boards (about 45%) responded to the survey. Since a randomized sampling method was not used, the results cannot be directly generalized to all counties in the state. However, LBO believes that the survey results summarized below provide useful insight into the cost savings that could be expected from the bill.

Ballot Cost Savings Estimates

Table 1 below shows the average cost saving per election for the three types of elections for the responding counties, both as a whole and broken down into three population groups. The three population groups included are counties with populations above 100,000 (14 respondents), counties with populations between 99,999 and 50,000 (8 respondents), and counties with populations below 50,000 (18 respondents).

Table 2 below shows the average total cost saving by presidential and non-presidential election year for the responding counties as a whole and broken down by population.

A few facts about the estimates are important to note. First, the survey did not ask about absentee balloting. Including estimates of absentee ballot cost savings would likely increase savings realized by many counties. For example, counties that use automatic or electronic voting machines would not realize cost savings under the proposed legislation, except possibly for the costs of printing absentee ballots.

Second, many respondents appeared to simply estimate the difference in cost between printing the current 101% of registered voters per precinct versus the cost of providing 105% of the ballot cast in the last comparable election per precinct. This approximation suggests the estimates probably overstate the savings to counties, since most counties would probably print more than the minimum 105% allowed by the bill. Also, in some cases, reducing the number of ballots ordered may reduce savings, as the cost per ballot could increase.

Third, the estimates do not take into account the incurred costs to capture the estimated savings. Such costs could include the following: purchase of computer hardware and/or software in order to be print ballots on demand, cost of blank ballot stock supply, and the cost of delivering ballots to precincts that run low. Purchasing the necessary computer hardware and/or software could cost thousands of dollars. Therefore, many counties would make a significant initial investment to capture the future cost savings

Table 1: *Average ballot cost saving per election type*

Population	Primary Election	General Election	Special Election
All responding counties	\$1,925	\$1,711	\$253
Above 100,000	\$3,931	\$3,167	\$365
50,000 to 99,999	\$2,374	\$1,766	\$546
Below 50,000	\$853	\$667	\$347

As Table 1 shows, the bill could save local governments an average of \$1,925 on a primary election, \$1,711 on a general election, and \$253 on a special election with larger counties saving the most money. The highest amount a county estimated saving was nearly \$13,000. The lowest was no savings for counties such as Franklin which use electronic or automatic voting machines.

Table 2: *Average total ballot cost saving per election year type*

Population	Presidential Year	Non-Presidential Year
All responding counties	\$4,146	\$3,631
Above 100,000	\$7,396	\$7,528
50,000 to 99,999	\$5,388	\$3,983
Below 50,000	\$1,738	\$1,995

The total average ballot cost saving calculation in Table 2 above assumes that three elections (primary, general, and special) are held in the calendar year. Average total cost savings for ballot printing for all counties in a presidential year was \$4,146 while in a non-presidential year it was \$3,631. As indicated above, the saving realized by a particular county is affected by many factors. The savings could range from no savings to tens of thousands of dollars saved per year depending upon the particular county.

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