
Detailed Fiscal Analysis

The bill allows the Legislative Service Commission (LSC) to direct, by rule, how new matter is indicated in, and old matter is omitted from, bills. Under the bill, any such rules will take effect beginning with the 124th General Assembly. One change being considered at this time is to replace capitalizing of new matter in a bill with underlining. According to a spokesperson for the LSC, changing from capitalizing to underlining could reduce the cost of developing the new bill drafting system for the 124th General Assembly. Computer consultants have told LSC that underlining new material would require less computer programming than capitalizing. Exactly how much might be saved is unknown. Any such cost savings would be experienced in FY 2000 and the beginning of FY 2001 as the new bill drafting system is developed.

In addition to reducing computer consultant costs, LSC believes that underlining new material could reduce the time it takes their agency to enter new material into the bill drafting system, by reducing the number of “computer tags”* that must be entered into a bill when it is drafted. Presumably, reducing the number of “computer tags” would also reduce the potential for drafting errors. However, any such reduction in time and errors would likely be small. Therefore, any fiscal impact would be negligible. Any such cost savings would not be realized until FY 2001, after the new drafting rules have been adopted and implemented.

Similarly, underlining new matter in bills could produce a negligible savings for both the House and Senate Clerk’s Offices by reducing the time that it takes their offices to engross and enroll bills. According to a spokesperson for the Senate Clerk’s Office, when a bill receives concurrence from both chambers an electronic copy is sent to a professional printer to produce the enrolled version of the act. Problems with “computer tag” conversion between the state’s mainframe computer and the printer’s computer system often result in errors. Thus, reducing the number of “computer tags” in each bill might reduce the number of times that acts are sent back to the printer to correct such errors. As stated in the paragraph above, any such cost savings would not be realized until FY 2001.

Lastly, the bill eliminates references to "19__" dates found in various statutory forms to permit their accurate use in the year 2000 and the future. The forms include, but are not limited to, forms pertaining to elections, calculation of child support obligations, and tax foreclosure and forfeiture proceedings. The bill contains an emergency clause to allow for the forms to be changed before we enter the year 2000.

*Note: In general terms, “computer tags” tell the computer system when to capitalize, underline, italicize, quote, etc. Word processing systems enter these tags automatically. However, the current word processing systems on the market have line limitations that would prohibit their use for bill drafting purposes. Therefore, current technology requires that LSC utilize a bill drafting system in which the “computer tags” must be entered by hand.

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