
Detailed Fiscal Analysis

The bill requires boards of elections to modify precinct boundaries by April 1, 2000. After this date, the time necessary to convert will be lost and precincts will be adjusted by population estimates. Under the bill, the modification should have precincts match U.S. Census geographical units for an exact determination of precinct population.. The unit most likely used for the change will be the Block unit, since it is the smallest measurement in the Census unit hierarchy. Common borders for Block units include streets, highways, streams, bodies of water, railroad tracks, and other permanent physical features. For aggregation purposes, block units match municipal and county boundaries even when no physical features exist.

Independently, the cost of converting to Census block units for each precinct would be substantial. It would be necessary for each board of elections to individually become familiar with the manner that Census blocks are determined and located in each county. To complete this responsibility, each board would have to dedicate a staff member (or hire a consultant) to develop a Geographic Information System (GIS) containing the census block maps and the current precinct border. Census block information is available in a format known as a TIGER file. Manipulation of TIGER files requires some understanding of GIS computer functions. It is uncommon for county boards of elections to have this expertise on hand.

Although this would be the process for boards of elections to complete the law independently, another solution already exists. Through a contract with the Legislative Service Commission (LSC), Cleveland State University (with sub-contractor Ohio University) has developed individual TIGER maps for each board of elections. To use the map, the board of elections must provide a current precinct map. The universities provide consultation to the boards for which precinct lines should be moved and what electors to contact.

As of December 31, 1998, the universities indicated that three (3) counties were in full compliance, nine (9) were near compliance, and eleven (11) were still developing maps. The remaining sixty-five (65) counties did not respond to requests. Passage of the bill would require all 88 boards of elections to comply, so the 65 non-respondent counties would be required to create Census-compliant maps (with or without the assistance of the two universities). Please also note Cuyahoga County estimates saving \$400,000 from a substantial reduction in precincts. (Savings estimates from other counties were not available, but are being researched.)

□ *LBO staff: Brian A. Friedman, Budget/Policy Analyst*

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