

OFFICE OF FISCAL ANALYSIS

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sHB-5001

AN ACT CONCERNING ABSENTEE VOTING FOR ALL AND VARIOUS OTHER REFORMS TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF ELECTIONS.

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact:

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 27 \$	FY 28 \$	FY 29 \$
Secretary of the State	GF - Cost	1.9 million to 2.05 million	341,000 to 459,000	506,000 to 646,000
Secretary of the State	GF - Savings	70,000 to 150,000	60,000 to 125,000	70,000 to 150,000
Elections Enforcement Commission	GF - Cost	68,000	87,500	87,500
State Comptroller - Fringe Benefits ¹	GF - Cost	27,000	36,000	36,000

Note: GF=General Fund

Municipal Impact:

Municipalities	Effect	FY 27 \$	FY 28 \$	FY 29 \$
All Municipalities	STATE MANDATE ² - Cost	824,000 to 2.5 million	650,000 to 1.9 million	820,000 to 2.35 million
Various Municipalities	Potential Savings	See Below	See Below	See Below
All Municipalities	STATE MANDATE - Cost	Minimal	Minimal	Minimal

¹The fringe benefit costs for most state employees are budgeted centrally in accounts administered by the Comptroller. The estimated active employee fringe benefit cost associated with most personnel changes is 41.82% of payroll in FY 27.

² State mandate is defined in Sec. 2-32b(2) of the Connecticut General Statutes, "state mandate" means any state initiated constitutional, statutory or executive action that requires a local government to establish, expand or modify its activities in such a way as to necessitate additional expenditures from local revenues.

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Explanation

The bill authorizes all eligible voters to apply for and participate in elections via absentee voting, alters existing absentee ballot provisions, and establishes risk-limiting audits, among other changes. The bill results in General Fund costs of approximately \$2 million to \$2.15 million in FY 27, \$464,500 to \$582,500 in FY 28, and \$629,500 to \$769,500 in FY 29. There are additionally General Fund savings anticipated of approximately \$60,000 to \$150,000 annually beginning in FY 27.

The bill also results in a total cost to municipalities of \$824,000 to \$2.5 million in FY 27, \$650,000 to \$1.9 million in FY 28, and \$820,000 to \$2.35 million in FY 29. Costs continue in the out years.

State Fiscal Impacts

The bill's state costs are primarily to the Secretary of the State (SOTS), totaling approximately \$1.9 million to \$2.05 million in FY 27, \$341,000 to \$459,000 in FY 28, and \$506,000 to \$646,000 in FY 29, with costs continuing into the out years. These costs are associated with supporting the anticipated increase in absentee voting,³ reprinting current forms, updating the current ballot tracking system, and implementing risk-limiting audits, as described below.

The bill additionally results in aggregate savings to the state of \$70,000 to \$150,000 in FY 27, \$60,000 to \$125,000 in FY 28, and \$70,000 to \$150,000 in FY 29, with ongoing savings in the out years. This savings is associated with the elimination of the absentee ballot outer envelope.

The total state costs and savings may vary from the ranges provided above if absentee voting participation is significantly higher or lower than projected.

³ This estimate assumes: (1) on the lower end, an increase of 10% of the participating electorate shifting to absentee voting in each town in response to the legislation; and (2) on the higher end, a shift in line with Massachusetts patterns (ranging from 24.7% to 30.9%) depending on a town's number of registered voters.

Expanded Absentee Voting. The bill's expanded absentee voting provisions (Sections 1 and 26-28) result in a cost to the state of \$292,000 to \$433,000 in FY 27, \$184,500 to \$302,500 in FY 28, and \$194,500 to \$334,500 in FY 29, with costs continuing in the out years. The majority of these costs are to SOTS, associated with providing additional forms.⁴

SOTS will need to print additional absentee ballot materials to support the expected increase in absentee voting participation, resulting in a cost of \$72,000 to \$213,000 in FY 27, \$61,000 to \$179,000 in FY 28, and \$71,000 to \$211,000 in FY 29, with costs continuing in the out years. This cost is expected to vary annually depending on the number of electors who choose to participate via absentee ballot and the types of elections held.

The bill additionally allows an elector to choose to permanently participate via absentee voting (Section 9), beginning in FY 27. This provision may increase the SOTS absentee ballot materials costs beyond the estimates described above. The extent of the cost increase depends on the number of electors who choose this option but in the absence of the provision, would not have opted for absentee voting for every election.

Additionally, in FY 27, there is a one-time cost of \$125,000 to SOTS to reprint approximately 1.35 million forms. Reprinting is necessary to remove existing references to the requirement to provide an excuse to participate via absentee voting.

The expansion of absentee voting also results in a cost to the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC) of \$68,000⁵ and one position⁶ in FY 27, with an associated fringe cost of \$27,000, before increasing to an annual salary of \$86,000 beginning in FY 28, with

⁴ Expanded absentee voting, excluding the public information campaign, results in costs to SOTS of \$197,000 to \$338,000 in FY 27, \$61,000 to \$179,000 in FY 28, and \$71,000 to \$211,000 in FY 29.

⁵ This represents 0.75 FTE in FY 27. Costs include a salary of \$64,500 and other expenses of \$3,500.

⁶ The position is a Legal Investigator.

ongoing other expenses of \$1,500 and an associated fringe cost of \$36,000. The position is necessary because the bill's expansion of absentee voting is anticipated to result in an increase in SEEC investigations.

Absentee Voting Ballot Tracking. The bill requires SOTS to develop and install ballot-tracking software (Section 8), resulting in an annual cost of approximately \$75,000 beginning in FY 27. This estimate is based on a private vendor cost from another state. If SOTS chooses to integrate the United States Postal Service (USPS) tracking into the state's Centralized Voter Registration System (CVRS), costs may vary.

Absentee Voting and the Elimination of the Outer Envelope. The bill eliminates the requirement for a second envelope to be used by electors participating via absentee voting (Section 2), resulting in savings to SOTS of \$70,000 to \$150,000⁷ in FY 27, \$60,000 to \$125,000 in FY 28, and \$70,000 to \$150,000 in FY 29, with savings continued into the out years. The exact savings will depend on the number of electors who choose to participate via absentee voting.

Public Awareness Mailing. The bill's changes to election law and processes, primarily the absentee voting expansion, result in a one-time cost to SOTS of \$1.3 million⁸ in FY 27 to conduct a statewide voter mailing.

Risk-Limiting Audits. The bill's establishment of risk-limiting audits (Sections 45 and 57) results in a cost to SOTS of \$340,000 in FY 27, \$205,000 in FY 28, and \$360,000 annually beginning in FY 29.

SOTS costs in FY 27 consist of two one-time costs and annual costs. One-time FY 27 costs are: (1) \$200,000 to support program development;

⁷ This estimate assumes: (1) on the lower end, an increase of 10% of the participating electorate shifting to absentee voting in each town in response to the legislation; and (2) on the higher end, a shift in line with Massachusetts patterns (ranging from 24.7% to 30.9%) depending on a town's number of registered voters.

⁸ This is based on the USPS standard media mail rate. This cost also includes the initial printing of the mailing, postage, and printing additional copies of that mailing to town clerks to include with absentee ballot applications.

and (2) \$15,000 for licensing to support the pilot program. The program development costs, which are paid for by SOTS but ultimately borne by the University of Connecticut Center for Voting Technology and Research, are associated with developing and testing auditing software and processes and conducting the initial audits created by the pilot program.

Annual costs are expected to be: (1) \$125,000 beginning in FY 27 for the program's ongoing maintenance and upkeep; (2) \$80,000 beginning in FY 28 to support risk-limiting audit software licensing; and (3) \$155,000 beginning in FY 29 for equipment replacement costs.

Attorney General Action on Federal Election Interference. The bill authorizes the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) to seek relief to prevent election interference, resulting in no fiscal impact to the state. The OAG has the resources and expertise to meet the requirements of the bill.

Municipal Fiscal Impacts

The bill results in an estimated total cost⁹ to municipalities of \$824,000 to \$2.5 million in FY 27,¹⁰ \$650,000 to \$1.9 million in FY 28,¹¹ and \$820,000 to \$2.35 million in FY 29,¹² with costs continuing in the out years. These costs are associated with: (1) the additional labor and materials required to support the expected increase in absentee voting; and (2) labor needed to carry out risk-limiting audits beginning in FY 27. The statewide total municipal costs may vary from the ranges provided above if absentee voting participation is significantly higher or lower than projected.

⁹ This estimate was calculated using vote by mail town costs from the [Massachusetts certified cost data](#). The Massachusetts cost data comes from the 2024 election and has been adjusted to account for size, participation, and voting patterns within each town in Connecticut.

¹⁰ FY 27 includes the 2026 State Election Primary and the 2026 State Election.

¹¹ FY 28 includes the 2027 Municipal Primary, 2027 Municipal Election and the 2028 Presidential Preference Primary.

¹² FY 29 includes the 2028 State Election Primary and the 2028 Presidential Election.

Expanded Absentee Voting. The bill's expanded absentee voting provisions (Sections 1, 2, and 26-28) result in a cost to municipalities of \$800,000 to \$2.5 million in FY 27, \$650,000 to \$1.9 million in FY 28, and \$770,000 to \$2.3 million in FY 29, with costs continuing in the out years. This cost is associated with the additional labor, storage, printing, and postage needed to facilitate and process additional absentee ballots.¹³ The estimate is based on municipal costs incurred in Massachusetts under a similar policy, applied to Connecticut towns with comparable electorates.

The exact cost will vary substantially by town, depending on the number of registered voters, as well as on election participation and absentee-voting rates. Towns with smaller numbers¹⁴ of registered voters will generally see a significantly lower cost than towns with higher numbers¹⁵ of registered voters.

Absentee Voting and the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). As part of the absentee voting changes, the bill additionally requires municipalities to provide a secondary envelope, and, optionally, prepaid postage to support ballot access for certain electors (Section 5), resulting in a statewide cost of up to \$22,000 in FY 27 (if municipalities choose to prepay postage). Connecticut has an estimated 31,570 electors who have not previously complied with HAVA requirements to provide required identification to participate in federal elections. The exact cost will vary by town and depend on the number of such voters who choose to participate by absentee ballot.

Expand Absentee and Early Voting to Certain Electors. The bill allows eligible 17-year-olds who will be 18 by election day to participate

¹³ This estimate assumes: (1) on the lower end, an increase of 10% of the participating electorate shifting to absentee voting in each town in response to the legislation; and (2) on the higher end, a shift in line with Massachusetts patterns (ranging from 24.7% to 30.9%) depending on a town's number of registered voters.

¹⁴ Towns with fewer than 5,000 registered voters are expected to see a cost increase of \$500 to \$1,300 in FY 27, \$500 to \$1,100 in FY 28, and \$500 to \$1,200 in FY 29.

¹⁵ Towns with greater than 50,000 registered voters are expected to see a cost increase of \$21,000 to \$59,000 in FY 27, \$15,000 to \$43,000 in FY 28, and \$22,000 to \$63,000 in FY 29.

via absentee and early voting (Section 41), resulting in a minimal cost beginning in FY 27. The exact cost will vary by town and depend on the number of qualified electors who participate via the above methods, which is expected to be minimal.

Optional Shift to Quadrennial Elections. The bill allows municipalities to shift to quadrennial elections beginning in FY 27 (Section 29), so that municipal elections coincide with existing state and federal elections, resulting in savings to municipalities. The exact savings will depend on the number of municipalities that choose to shift their municipal election dates and the amount those municipalities would have otherwise spent on municipal elections. The timing of the savings depends on when (if at all) a municipality adopts the shift.

Risk-Limiting Audits. Municipalities will incur additional labor costs statewide of approximately \$2,000¹⁶ in FY 27 and up to \$50,000¹⁷ for applicable races in FY 29 and beyond to complete risk-limiting audits (Sections 45 and 57). The bill establishes a limited pilot program in FY 27 for three municipalities, before expanding the applicability of RLA in FY 29. The exact cost will depend on whether a statewide race qualifies for risk-limiting audits and on the number of other races subject to them.

The Out Years

State Impact:

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact above will continue into the future subject to inflation, the number of electors who participate via absentee, and the number of risk-limiting audits conducted.

Municipal Impact:

Costs in the out years will vary depending on: (1) the annual number and types of elections conducted; (2) the proportion of the electorate

¹⁶ This cost is the estimated maximum cost for three municipalities to complete the pilot program for State Elections in FY 27.

¹⁷ This figure represents the anticipated cost if at least one statewide/federal office in each applicable election is subject to risk-limiting audits. The actual cost is expected to be lower and will vary based on the number of races subject to risk-limiting audits.

who newly decide to participate via absentee voting; and (3) inflation in postage and labor costs.

Savings will depend on the number of municipalities that switch to quadrennial elections.