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Office of Research
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Legislative Budget
Office

S.B. 186
133rd General Assembly

Fiscal Note & Local Impact Statement

[Click here for S.B. 186's Bill Analysis](#)

Version: As Introduced

Primary Sponsors: Sens. Manning and Sykes

Local Impact Statement Procedure Required: No

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Highlights

- The extent of any IT-related cost increases for the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) and the Secretary of State (SOS) to implement the Voter Verification and Registration Program (VVRP) is unknown. Because the costs of implementing the VVRP in Ohio are uncertain, LBO examined the cost estimates from other states that recently enacted some similar version of an automated voter registration program.
- Other state agencies that would subsequently be required to participate in the automatic voter registration system under SOS rules will also see increased costs for adapting their IT systems.
- Allowing people to be automatically registered to vote when interacting with the BMV or other agencies will increase the number of transactions processed at these locations. While it can reasonably be expected that the number of voter registrations or registration changes would increase, the total magnitude of this increase is unclear.
- Even though the bill would result in cost increases for the SOS, the Department of Public Safety (DPS), and county boards of elections, there would also be some offsetting cost savings realized through the efficiencies of the voter registration and registration update process under the bill.

Detailed Analysis

Devising an automated system to register new voters or update existing voter registration information will impose new IT-related costs on the Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) housed within the Department of Public Safety (DPS), and the Secretary of State (SOS). Other state agencies, most likely those that provide public assistance, would bear IT costs if the Secretary of State issues rules requiring them to provide automatic voting at their service locations. Although there would be new costs for implementing the Voter Verification and

Registration Program, there are some potential cost savings for the SOS and county boards of elections with respect to processing voter registrations and changes to registration information. There are also a variety of provisions with little or no fiscal effect. A detailed description of these provisions can be found in the LSC bill analysis.

Cost of the Voter Verification and Registration Program

The Department of Public Safety, which oversees the BMV, would likely incur the bulk of the IT-related costs for establishing the Voter Verification and Registration Program. Although some of the system changes will be relatively easy to make, the provisions of the bill that pertain to determination of citizenship and the addition of party affiliation would require more extensive system changes. Neither of these forms of data is currently collected by the agency. DPS has indicated to LBO that it does not have a total cost estimate of these changes as of this writing. In addition to these system changes, providing the option to register and update registrations at BMV locations could result in a substantial increase in the number of potential transactions handled at these facilities. However, merely increasing the number of transactions processed is unlikely to result in any substantive cost increases to deputy registrars or BMV locations operated by DPS. These costs would be paid from the Highway Purposes Fund (Fund 5TM0) under appropriation item 762321, Operating Expense – BMV.

The Secretary of State would also see some cost increases resulting from the bill. Currently, the SOS generally collects the information required by the bill during the voter registration process. This information is housed within the Statewide Voter Registration Database (SVRD). The costs of maintaining the SVRD are paid from the Business Services Fund (Fund 5990) appropriation item 050629, Statewide Voter Registration Database. While the SOS and DPS have discussed the logistics of these changes, the SOS does not have a cost estimate of those possible IT costs as of this writing. However, since the SOS already maintains the state's voter registration system, its costs for any needed IT updates are likely to be lower than those of DPS.

The bill could affect the volume of voter registrations and updates in different ways. It is possible that the SOS could see a potential increase in voter registration workload as a result of the bill. However, it is also quite likely that individuals that would have otherwise registered to vote or change voter registration status with the SOS or county board of elections would do so at one of the participating government agencies under the bill. In this case, they would be substituting one way of registering or updating for another. Overall, there are approximately 8.0 million registered voters in Ohio as of this writing.

Automatic voter registration in other states

Because a cost estimate for Ohio to develop the Voter Verification and Registration Program is not available, LBO examined the costs of implementing similar automatic voter registration programs in other states. As of this writing, there are 36 states that have some form of automated voter registration where citizens are given the choice to be electronically registered at the same time they do business with a government office (typically the BMV), having their voter registration information digitally transmitted to the appropriate elections office.

In FY 2018, the state of Washington implemented a similar program to the one proposed in this bill. The legislation creating the program also required the state to undertake a series of studies related to its implementation.¹ Overall, the estimated statewide IT costs were projected to be \$280,000.² The agencies participating in automatic voter registration as required under the Washington legislation were the BMV, the Health Benefit Exchange, and any other state agencies approved by the Governor.

Cost savings from states with automatic registration

There are also cost savings associated with implementing automatic voter registration. The Washington Secretary of State, for example, noted cost savings of approximately \$176,000 over the past two fiscal years.³ The state of Delaware's Department of Elections indicated that the automatic voter registration program implemented in that state resulted in \$200,000 in cost savings in the program's first year, with local elections officials also realizing some savings.⁴ Similarly, the Voter Verification and Registration Program proposed under S.B. 186 would most likely yield savings for the state and county boards of elections in the form of reduced voter registration and registration update processing costs. In Ohio's case, the savings would probably be less significant, though, since the IT upgrades required for Ohio to institute automatic voter registration would be less extensive than those required in Washington and Delaware.

Other election provisions in the bill

The bill contains various other elections-related provisions pertaining to eligibility of signing candidate petitions and eligibility to be a candidate, voting in primary provisions, confidentiality with respect to voting, and other various technical changes. In total, these provisions of the bill appear to have no direct fiscal impact on the Secretary of State or county boards of elections.

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¹ <http://lawfilesexternal.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2017-18/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/2595-S2.SL.pdf>.

² <https://fortress.wa.gov/ofm/fnspublic/FNSPublicSearch/Search/bill/2595/65>.

³ <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/voter-registration-modernization-states>.

⁴ <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/vrm-states-delaware>.