

Colorado Legislative Council Staff Fiscal Note
**STATE and LOCAL
 FISCAL IMPACT**

Drafting Number: LLS 11-0276
Prime Sponsor(s): Rep. Murray
 Sen. Johnston

Date: February 7, 2011
Bill Status: House SVMA
Fiscal Analyst: Alex Schatz (303-866-4375)

TITLE: CONCERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MAIL BALLOT ELECTIONS.

Fiscal Impact Summary	FY 2011-2012	FY 2012-2013
State Revenue		
State Expenditures		
Cash Funds		
Department of State Cash Fund	\$ 6,140	
FTE Position Change		
Effective Date: August 10, 2011, if the General Assembly adjourns on May 11, 2011, as scheduled, and no referendum petition is filed.		
Appropriation Summary for FY 2011-2012: See State Appropriations section.		
Local Government Impact: Reduced costs to counties. See Local Government Impact section.		

Summary of Legislation

The bill implements mail balloting as the principal form of voting in Colorado, with limited exceptions. Mail ballot elections are required for all general, primary, odd-year, recall, and congressional vacancy elections conducted on or after July 1, 2011.

Counties where mail ballot elections would result in higher costs may opt out of mail ballot elections and conduct polling place elections. The bill clarifies that municipalities and political subdivisions of the state other than a county may opt not to conduct a mail ballot election. As an alternative to casting a ballot by mail, voters may choose to cast a ballot at a service center, at the county clerk's office, or at other locations designated by the county clerk.

The bill requires election officials to modify forms and procedures, to designate ballot drop-off locations for certain elections, and to establish service centers to facilitate the mail ballot process and in-person voting. The bill adjusts deadlines for voter notifications and acceptance of mail ballots, establishes minimum days of operation at service centers, and removes statutory references to permanent mail-in voter status and other obsolete provisions.

The bill requires the Secretary of State's office to update the statewide voter registration (SCORE) system; to review and approve or disapprove mail ballot plans for each election, submitted by each county; and to adopt by rule a standard mail ballot plan.

State Expenditures

The bill will increase costs in the Department of State by \$6,140 in FY 2011-12, paid from the Department of State Cash Fund. Updates to both the statewide voter registration system (SCORE) and the on-line voter registration system are required to remove information related to the list of permanent mail-in voters. Contract services for 60 hours of programming will result in a one-time cost of \$6,140. The review of mail ballot plans and opt-out requests will increase workload in the department, particularly in even-numbered years, but the department is presently capable of handling these new responsibilities within existing appropriations.

The Department of Local Affairs will experience a temporary increase in workload based on its duty to provide technical assistance to special districts. Special district inquiries regarding the impacts of the bill are expected to have a minimal impact on costs in the department and will be absorbed within existing appropriations.

Local Government Impact

Mail ballot elections are expected to substantially reduce costs for many counties. The bill reduces costs to counties by eliminating the duplication of effort to maintain voter registration records and the permanent mail-in voter list. For most counties, the cost to conduct an election will be reduced by eliminating costs for polling places, voting equipment, and polling place staff. While mail ballot elections may increase costs for mailings, overall cost savings are expected for most counties. The fiscal note assumes that counties and other local governments will opt out of mail ballot elections if adhering to a mail ballot system would increase costs.

Based on data from the 2008 general election, the potential cost savings of mail ballot elections for Colorado counties is estimated at \$8.2 million across Colorado (approximately \$7.1 million in the state's 11 largest counties, \$715,000 in mid-size counties, and \$325,000 in small counties).

State Appropriations

To implement this bill, the Department of State requires an appropriation of \$6,140 from the Department of State Cash Fund in FY 2011-12.

Departments Contacted

State Local Affairs