

Vermont Legislative Joint Fiscal Office

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FISCAL NOTE

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S.15 An act relating to correcting defective ballots – As Recommended by the House Committee on Government Operations – Draft 1.4

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/WorkGroups/House%20Appropriations/Bills/S.15/W~S.15%20-%20Correcting%20Defective%20Ballots~As%20Recommended%20by%20the%20House%20Committee%20on%20Government%20Operations~5-4-2021.pdf>

Summary

The bill requires the Secretary of State to mail every active voter a postage-paid ballot for each general election, held every two years in even-numbered years. One-time costs for necessary equipment, software updates, and voter education require spending about \$800,000 in FY22. Recurring costs in every even-numbered year starting in 2022 will be \$2,043,000 adjusted for inflation in subsequent years. In addition, the Secretary of State requests a new position for their Elections Team at a cost of about \$125,000 annually. The State could choose to appropriate half the required recurring amount each year and hold the excess funds in a Special Fund. For FY22, it may be possible to use one-time federal money to fund some of the expenses.

Analysis

The Secretary of State's Office sent postage-paid ballots to every active voter for both the statewide primary election in August 2020 and the general election in November 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, the state has recent evidence on the cost of doing so.

Moving from a one-time emergency event to a recurring event will require some one-time costs, however. Those one-time expense items include about 150 long-lasting ballot boxes to be located at town ballot collection sites, mechanized letter openers, software changes to make the processing run smoothly, and voter education. One-time expenses are \$800,000. It may be possible to use one-time federal money to fund those expenses.

| One-Time Costs | Units | Unit Price | Estimated Total Costs |
|-----------------------|-------|------------|-----------------------|
| Secure Drop Boxes | 150 | \$2,000 | \$300,000 |
| Letter Opener | 100 | \$1,000 | \$100,000 |
| Software Change | | | \$100,000 |
| Voter Education | | | \$300,000 |
| Total One-Time | | | \$800,000 |

Recurring costs in even-numbered years at the time of the statewide primary election in August and the general election in November will cover printing and mailing costs, including the cost of return postage for ballots.

| Recurring Costs | | Estimated Total Costs |
|---|--|-----------------------|
| Statewide Primary (in August of even-numbered years) | | |
| Postcard Printing and Mailing | | \$443,000 |
| Additional Ballots for In-Person Voting | | \$50,000 |
| | | |
| General Election (in November of even-numbered years) | | |
| Ballot Printing and Mailing | | \$1,500,000 |
| Additional Ballots for In-Person Voting | | \$50,000 |
| Total Recurring | | \$2,043,000 |

In future years, the recurring costs will increase at the rate of inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index.

Additional Position in the Secretary of State's Office

The Secretary of State's Office requests an additional position for their five-person Elections Division. The annual cost of the Elections Assistant Director will be approximately \$125,000 for salary and benefits beginning FY22.

Appropriations

Timing of appropriations: may need one-time funds of \$800,000 in FY22 if one-time federal funds cannot be used.

For the elections to be held in August and November of 2022, the Secretary of State's Office needs the appropriation for the full \$2,043,000 at the start of FY23 – i.e., July 1st, 2022. The legislature could choose to appropriate half the biennial amount each year and place the off-year amount in a Special Fund for Election Expenses. It may be possible to use one-time federal funds for the initial round of recurring expenses.

An appropriation of approximately \$125,000 is needed to fund the new position of Elections Assistant Director at the Secretary of State's Office. Again, it is possible that one-time federal funds could provide the first year of funding.