

absentee ballot. The State Board of Elections would establish the security and procedural requirements for the drop box.

Finally, SB 271 would provide additional time to process and count mail-in absentee ballots, and would extend poll hours on election day to 8 p.m. prevailing time. The county board of elections would be permitted to process and count mail-in absentee ballots up to 40 days before the election.

SB 271 would have a moderate fiscal impact on local governments. There would be additional costs associated with allowing early the additional “no excuse” reason as a basis for absentee ballot voting and with allowing extended “early” voting. Combining precincts to a single location could result in cost savings due to the fewer number of required poll workers and decreased costs associated with multiple locations. There could be additional costs associated with ballot boxes if those already used are not sufficient to meet standards promulgated by the State Board of Elections. Some costs would be offset by available state funding.

The additional Saturday voting would increase costs for poll workers, staff, and possible location rental if Saturday voting is not already allowed in a county. There would also be costs for counties to update equipment, and there would be costs associated with additional staffing for in-person early voting in general.

According to the Secretary of State’s Office, the bill could potentially increase costs for rental of polling places for the additional 2 hours. County clerks will need increased funds to help pay poll workers. County clerks receive some funding from the State Board of Elections, but the funding has not been increased for decades. Each individual county sets the rates for paying its poll workers.

The Secretary of State’s Office reports that the State Board of Elections has already created a secure online portal to request absentee ballots. There would be a large cost increase for absentee ballots with a “convenience of the voter” excuse.

For the 2020 general election, 626,000 absentee ballots were cast. This compares to about 47,000 absentee ballots for the general election in 2016. The increase for 2020 was largely due to the temporary increase in permitted reasons (concern about contracting or spreading COVID-19) for obtaining an absentee ballot and the state’s new web portal. It may be likely that a “convenience of the voter” reason would significantly increase the number of absentee ballots as well. Generally, it is likely that fewer *total* ballots would be cast in non-presidential elections.

For the 2020 primary election, the State Board of Elections approved \$1 million to \$1.2 million to pay for return postage (although Kentucky does not typically provide prepaid postage for absentee ballots) and \$1 million to \$1.1 million for county clerks to hire staff for up to four weeks to help with processing of absentee ballots and the casting of in-person early ballots. If similar funding does not continue, there would be significant additional costs to counties. It is estimated that the cost of printing is up to \$0.25 per page for an

absentee ballot, depending on the county's printing contract. Each absentee ballot would have multiple pages and envelopes.

The State Board of Elections reports that the state pays each county clerk \$0.34 per voter who was registered at the time of the election. (KRS 117.343 allows payment up to \$0.50 per registered voter, but this is contingent upon funding.) Reimbursement is based on personnel expenses and is only reimbursed after a primary election. The eligibility of the county varies because of the number of registered voters at the time of the election. Also, under KRS 117.345, which allows payment of \$255 per precinct, each fiscal court is actually paid \$200 per precinct registered in the county upon certification of the election as reimbursement to the county for election related expenses. The difference between the statutory and actual amounts is attributable to General Assembly funding.

The funds currently received are not sufficient to cover election costs, and the counties must cover the remainder.

The Kentucky County Clerks' Association reports that there would be costs associated with expanding the polling hours. In addition, this would make recruiting of precinct workers even more difficult than is currently the case.

The Fayette County Clerk reports that there may be a need to split shifts because of the lengthy day. If that is the case, then election officer costs would increase by approximately 50%. There would also be security considerations because, for example, officers in the afternoon would not know about voters from the morning shift. The clerk also said that recruiting poll workers would be an even larger challenge.

According to Kingsley, a company that supplies drop boxes, a drop box may cost as much as \$1,400 (or more) depending on regulatory requirements.

Part III: Differences to Local Government Mandate Statement from Prior Versions

Part II, above, relates to the bill as introduced.

Data Source(s): LRC Staff; <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/politics/elections/kentucky/2020/11/11/kentucky-elections-far-fewer-absentee-ballots-rejected-general/6161749002/>; <https://www.kentucky.com/news/politics-government/article242430706.html>; Secretary of State; Fayette County Clerk; Kentucky State Board of Elections; Kentucky County Clerks Association; Kentucky County Clerks' Association; Fayette County Clerk; Secretary of State's Office; State Board of Elections; <https://www.kingsley.com/>

Preparer: Robert Jenkins **Reviewer:** KHC **Date:** 3/3/21