

Fiscal Note

BILL # HB 2307

TITLE: elections; hand counting; machines; prohibition

SPONSOR: McGarr

STATUS: As Introduced

PREPARED BY: Micaela Larkin

Description

The bill would require that all votes be tabulated by hand in city, town, and county elections. Prohibits a city, town, or county from using a tabulating machine to count votes.

Estimated Impact

Overall, we estimate that the bill would increase counties' and cities' election expenses due to the change from automated tabulation to hand counting of ballots. Given the state's standard practice of automated tabulation, we lack sufficient data on hand counting practices (such as counting time per ballot) to develop a reliable estimate.

In addition, the bill as introduced contemplates conforming legislation to implement the new election requirements. Any subsequent legislation that enacts implementing details could significantly change the bill's fiscal impact.

The bill's cost is dependent on the number of races to be counted under the description of "city, town, and county election". This estimate assumes that automated tabulation would continue to be used for federal, state, school district and special district elections, along with for all judicial candidate/retention elections, and state ballot measures. Our analysis assumes that hand counting would be used in elections for county and city offices and county/city ballot measures.

As a caveat, we do not believe that the cost impacts described below can provide a holistic presentation of the fiscal impact, given that certain variables (as described below) could not be estimated with a reasonable amount of confidence.

Most of the bill's fiscal impact would occur at the local level, since most election costs are paid by the city or county governments. While the Arizona Association of Counties (AACo) has not attempted to quantify the aggregate cost impact of the legislation, the organization has suggested the bill's impact would depend on the types of elections covered and the processes for conducting the hand count.

We have asked the Secretary of State's Office for an estimate of any costs to their agency for this bill. As of publication, we have not received a response.

Analysis

Given the uncertainty surrounding the bill's fiscal impact, our analysis below attempts to quantify the potential impact for one single General Election in Maricopa County. This, however, is an incomplete measure of the bill's total fiscal impact as costs would also be incurred in other counties and also for additional elections (primary elections, and other specific instances like city runoff elections or recounts).

(Continued)



Local Government Election Hand Counting Costs

Depending on the year, General Election ballots in Maricopa County typically have a total of 70 to 80 ballot selections (candidates, judicial retention questions, and ballot measures). Based on a review of these items, in a typical "presidential" General Election year (where countywide officials are elected), we assume the bill's hand count requirement would apply to 10 selections for the average voter – this is based on the following selections for the voter: 1 county supervisor, 6 countywide officials (sheriff, recorder, treasurer, assessor, attorney, school superintendent), 1 city mayor, 1 city council member, and 1 other measure (a city or county ballot measure).

This analysis assumes the following issues are excluded from the hand count requirements: candidates for federal, state, school district and special district offices, any judicial candidate/retention elections, and any statewide ballot measures. Based on this data about the number of ballot items, the parameters below are a speculative estimate of the bill's cost for Maricopa County for one single General Election.

Assuming 10 selections per ballot require a hand count, if each selection takes 15 seconds to review voter intent and record the vote, this would take 2.5 minutes per ballot [10 selections X 15 seconds each ÷ 60 seconds per minute]. The official canvass of the 2020 General Election (where countywide officials were elected) indicates there were 2,089,563 ballots cast in Maricopa County. Using this ballot total multiplied by 2.5 minutes per ballot, that would suggest the resulting process would use approximately 87,065 hours of labor [2.09 million ballots X 2.5 minutes per ballot ÷ 60 minutes per hour]. Using this assumption of 87,065 labor hours X a \$25 hourly wage assumption, the manual hand counting of city/county races during a presidential year General Election in Maricopa County would cost approximately \$2.2 million.

This analysis does not assess the feasibility of finding enough staff/volunteers to generate 87,065 hours of labor during the ballot counting time period required by election deadlines. Our analysis also does not contemplate the cost of compiling the individual employee's hand count results and producing them as reportable totals, as we lack sufficient information on the potential process and any potential error rates in the hand counting process.

Other Potential Fiscal Impacts

As noted above, this analysis assumes the bill's hand counting provisions do not apply to federal, state, school district and special district offices, any judicial candidate/retention elections, and any statewide ballot measures. Instead, those elections would be counted using standard automated tabulation methods. Therefore, we estimate the bill's hand counting provisions will not produce any information technology savings – instead, the automatic methods will continue to be used for every single ballot, except with programming changes to only count the races eligible for automatic tabulation.

2/16/23