

Senate Fiscal Agency
P. O. Box 30036
Lansing, Michigan 48909-7536



Telephone: (517) 373-5383
Fax: (517) 373-1986
TDD: (517) 373-0543

Senate Bill 983 (as reported without amendment)
Sponsor: Senator Bev Hammerstrom
Committee: Government Operations

Date Completed: 3-20-00

RATIONALE

The Michigan Election Law prescribes the division of local units of government into election precincts. An election precinct must be contained in its entirety within a city, ward, township, or village. The Election Law also provides for the division of a single election precinct into two or more precincts based upon population and voting methods within a local unit of government. Precincts may be consolidated, once divided, but only if the election commission or other officials in charge of elections determine that there are 400 or fewer registered voters, in a local unit that uses paper ballots, or fewer than 3,000 registered voters in a local unit that uses voting machines. It has been suggested that, when it is anticipated that voter participation in an election will be low, local officials be allowed to consolidate election precincts for that election, under certain conditions.

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Michigan Election Law to provide that, if a city, ward, township, or village were divided into two or more election precincts, the city, ward, township, or village election commissioners could, by resolution, consolidate the election precincts for a particular election. In making the determination to consolidate, the election commission would have to take into consideration the number of choices the voter would have to make, the percentage of registered voters who voted at the last similar election in the jurisdiction, and the intensity of the interest of the electors in the jurisdiction concerning the candidates and proposals to be voted upon.

To consolidate election precincts for a particular election, the election commissioners, or other designated election officials, would have to do both of the following:

- Provide notice to the registered electors of the affected election precincts of the consolidation of precincts for the election, and the location of the polling place for the election precinct or

precincts for that election. Notice could be provided by mail or other method designed to provide actual notice to the registered electors.

- Post a written notice at each election precinct polling place stating the location of the consolidated election precinct polling place.

A consolidation of precincts could not be made less than 120 days before a primary, general, or special election.

Proposed MCL 168.659

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

It has been pointed out by local election officials that some elections, particularly those that involve only local issues, often attract little voter interest. One local election official testified that at one election, the local unit, which contains four election precincts, had attendance at the polls of only 2% of the registered voters. This results in election workers sitting at polling places for many hours with virtually nothing to do. Not only is this a waste of taxpayer money, but it also makes it harder for local officials to find people to work in the precincts on election day. Under specified conditions, the bill would give local election officials the option to consolidate election precincts when voter turnout was expected to be low, thus cutting election expenses and reducing an administrative burden.

Legislative Analyst: G. Towne

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State government. The fiscal impact on local government

is indeterminate. However, the consolidation of precincts could save local units money used for administrative costs. It is possible that local units of government would have to hire fewer precinct workers.

Fiscal Analyst: E. Limbs

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.