

Senate Fiscal Agency
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Senate Bill 61 (Substitute S-1 as passed by the Senate)
Sponsor: Senator Bev Hammerstrom
Committee: Government Operations

Date Completed: 1-10-02

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. When a local unit has been divided into two or more precincts, the precincts may be consolidated, 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 precincts for that election only, under certain conditions.

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Michigan Election Law to provide that, if a county, city, ward, township, or village were divided into two or more election precincts, the county, city, ward, township, or village election commissioners could, by resolution, consolidate the election precincts for a particular election. Election precincts could not be consolidated for a general November election, a primary election immediately before a general November election, or another statewide or Federal election. In determining to consolidate, the election commission would have to consider the number of choices a voter would have to make, the percentage of registered voters who voted at the last similar election in the

jurisdiction, and the intensity of interest of the electors in the jurisdiction concerning the candidates and proposals to be voted upon.

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

- Notify the registered electors of the affected precincts of the consolidation of precincts for the election, and the location of the polling place for the precinct or precincts for that election. Notice could be given 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 precinct polling place.

These notice requirements would not apply if the polling places for the precincts to be consolidated were located in the same building.

A consolidation of precincts could not be made less than 60 days before a primary, general, or special election.

If a county, city, ward, township, or village consolidated election precincts under the bill, each affected precinct would have to be treated as a whole unit and could not be divided during consolidation.

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

Local election officials have pointed out that some elections, particularly those that involve only local issues, often attract little voter interest and experience participation by an extremely low percentage of the registered voters. As a result, election workers' sometimes sit at polling places for many hours with virtually nothing to do. This not only wastes taxpayer money, but 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.

Opposing Argument

Consolidating election precincts could be a step toward consolidating elections, which could produce ballots that were confusing to the voters.

Legislative Analyst: G. Towne

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State government. The fiscal impact on local government is indeterminate. Fulfilling the elector notification requirement could require additional expenditures; however, the consolidation of the precincts would result in overall savings for local jurisdictions. Administrative costs would be reduced primarily due to a decreased need for election workers.

Fiscal Analyst: J. Runnels

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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.