



**STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS
FISCAL YEAR 2026 OPERATING BUDGET HEARING**

RESPONSE TO DEPARTMENT OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES ANALYSIS

**Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Senator Guy Guzzone, Chair
February 18, 2025**

**House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Public Safety and Administration
Delegate Jazz Lewis, Chair
February 20, 2025**

Highlights

The State Board of Elections under the directorship of the new State Administrator and administration successfully carried out the 2024 Presidential election as well as a special election in Prince George's County. In the 18 months that the new administration has been at SBE, the agency has gradually undergone a transition to modernizing practices, updating outdated regulations and policies and planning for the future.

SBE has aggressively recruited staff, becoming nearly 100% staffed for the first time in the agency's history. Along with a reorganization of departments, SBE has been more equipped to handle today's challenges facing election administration. Furthermore, we prioritized cybersecurity by creating and hiring a Chief Information Security Officer, CISO.

In addition, we have changed the SBE culture - to being more proactive and less reactive. The culture change has occurred on multiple fronts from the State Administrator being more accessible on social media, developing a new modern Maryland inclusive logo and motto, to our customer service with the various voters and stakeholders. We welcome partnerships with the local boards of elections (LBEs), General Assembly, and advocates to enhance voter experiences and opportunities. My administration is always looking at how new technologies can be implemented and assist with election administration, including the use of language assistance programs, text to cure on mail-in ballots and responsible uses of artificial intelligence.

Furthermore, SBE has engaged with many organizations and state agencies to improve voting access from designating Native American Lifeline as an National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) agency to enhancing voting opportunities at correctional facilities to expanding the voter address confidentiality program ensuring survivors of domestic violence the right to make their voices heard safely and securely - without risk of endangering themselves or their loved ones.

One of the areas of particular note, has been the improved relationships between the State Administrator and staff with the State Board members and local boards. We have focused on openness, trust, and transparency in building those bridges. Our State Board meetings have been overhauled and showcasing future planning and goals with more information of major procurements. In order to mitigate the high number of new LBE directors for the 2024 election, the SBE administration held daily check ins during election periods and frequent check ins with the new election directors. Failure was never an option. Moreover, we continue to hold monthly meetings and provide bi-weekly updates to the local boards keeping them updated with the latest information. We have established local board work groups to assist with each of the major IT projects and are working through new regulations establishing minimum requirements for office and warehouse spaces at the local boards.

One of our huge goals was to combat dis/mis/ and malinformation. This strategy's mission was to make SBE the trusted source of information for the public during the election cycle. We reimagine voter education with a program titled Vote!MD. We modernized our campaign strategy which included many press interviews, press releases, continuously building our social media presence in our efforts to combat dis/misinformation on elections and election processes.

The Vote!MD voter education campaign started with a dynamic, user friendly landing page with various election deadlines allowing for voters to seamlessly integrate them on their personal calendars. The outreach campaign focused on registering to vote and then the three ways to vote - early, by mail, or on election day. Information on how to update voter information, locate polling places and sign up to be an election judge was available on the landing page.

Overall, the outreach program was more effective than previous outreach programs:

- 108 TV spots and 458 radio spots aired (about 2.8 million impressions) and 13 print ads in newspapers (about 600,000 impressions)¹
- Digital ads generated 26,151,792 impressions²

¹ In 2022, there were 101 TV spots and 613 radio spots aired and eleven print ads in newspapers.

² In 2022, there were over 15.1 million impressions from the digital and traditional media campaigns

- About 7.3 million plays of digital ads with Facebook and Instagram being the most popular reaching 2.8 million Meta accounts of Maryland voters (remember there is 4.1 million registered voters) and establishing over 10 million impressions alone ³
- Over 351,000 clicks on the ads placed on digital platforms.⁴
- Over 292,000 users driven to SBE's [landing page](#) by the digital campaign⁵

Recognizing the budgetary deficit confronting the State coffers and the new reality of hybrid work force, in FY25, SBE relinquished and downsized our office space resulting in significant funding reduction for our leased office space. We continue to look for creative ways to fund the many of the initiatives and programs at SBE. However, the current federal landscape has caused some trepidation and consternation with the future of Election Assistance Commission (EAC) and other federal funding and grants. But we are committed to the mission of making Maryland's elections safe, secure and transparent. We again will look to utilize the best technology to maximize our resources for cybersecurity and physical security of the electoral process and protection of the election officials. In 2024, Maryland was a targeted state for a suspicious package, threatening letters and bomb threats.

Maryland has a multi-faceted approach to elections offering voters various means to cast a ballot running an extensive mail-in ballot voting program concurrently with in-person voting.

Regarding the 2024 election cycle:

- Marylanders vote early with roughly 55% choosing to vote before Election Day
- Nearly 880,000 mail-in ballots were sent meaning that over 1 in 5 voters requested a mail-in ballot. Over 630,000 were sent in the Primary Election resulting in 17% of the eligible voters requesting a mail-in ballot)
- In-person voting continues to be the primary way voters vote in the General Election with 70% of participating voters voting in-person. Most voters, (1,145,134 - 45.80% of all voters that voted in this election) voted on election day, and 984,945 voters (32.41% of all voters that voted in this election) voted during early voting.
- However, when an election occurs impacts voting methods- A June Primary in 2024 saw mail-in voting at nearly 40% with a significant drop in in-person early voting.

³ In 2022, there were over 3.7 million plays of the 0:15 and 0:30 second digital ads

⁴ In 2022, there were almost 270,000 clicks on the ads placed on Google, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram

⁵ In 2022, over 180,000 users driven to SBE's [2022 election landing page](#) by the digital campaign

- The use of the ballot drop boxes had dropped slightly since the 2022 election with only 47% of people using the 286 ballot drop boxes in the General Election.⁶
- Provisional voting hit all time highs. While provisional voting is historically higher for primary elections than it is for general elections, that trend did not hold for the 2024 election cycle. Rather, almost 150,000 voters cast provisional ballots for the General Election. This is largely due to voters who vote on election day at a polling place other than their assigned polling place and voters who have received a mail-in ballot choosing to vote in person.
- Individuals using same day registration to register and vote during early voting and on election day continue to rise. The 2024 General Election saw a surge in the use of same day registration. Prior to the 2024 election cycle, almost 58,000 individuals had registered to vote and over 26,700 voters had changed addresses as a result of the process. In this 2024 General Election alone, 57,902 individuals registered and voted during early voting or on election day, and over 7,529 voters updated their addresses during early voting⁷. In other words, almost as many people used same day registration for the Presidential General Election as had used it in all elections preceding this election cycle.
- This was the second post-COVID election and first Presidential. We are analyzing the data for lessons learned to figure out the new normal of voting patterns.

Maryland's public financing program is set for the 2026 gubernatorial election . Election Law Article §15-103 requires SBE to determine whether the balance of the Fair Campaign Financing Fund has sufficient funds to provide the public contributions to two eligible gubernatorial candidate tickets in a Primary Election and one eligible gubernatorial candidate ticket in the subsequent General Election. Therefore, \$9,000,000 is needed to ensure the program is fully funded for the 2026 Gubernatorial Elections. As of June 30, 2023, the current fund balance is \$8,376,276.95. SBE notified the Governor to include \$623,723.05 to be included in the annual budget bill for Fiscal Year 2025. However, due to our enforcement actions, the current balance as of December 10, 2024 is \$9,898,158.00. First time ever in the program's history it will be fully funded. Remember this was accomplished without any interest allocations because they are directed to the general fund for budget relief.

Additionally, SBE provides support and oversight for the local public financing programs. In 2024, Baltimore City had its first election with a Public Financing Program for

⁶ 50% return rate in the 2022 general election

⁷ The number of same day registrations is generally significantly lower in the primary election. During the 2024 Primary Election 3,708 people used same day registration and 524 used same day address change.

candidates for Mayor, City Council President and City Council. There were 8 participating candidates with 4 certified and 1 ultimately was elected. The program disbursed \$1,137,728.00 to certified candidates. In 2026, 5 counties, Montgomery, Howard, Baltimore County, Prince George's, and Anne Arundel County will have a public financing program available. Anne Arundel County is in the early stages of setting up their public financing system. We are working and meeting with county officials to develop a summary guide, faqs and outreach programs.

DLS Analysis

- 1. SBE should comment on how much funding is being retained for pending litigation and also provide an update on the litigation process, including the status of the pending receipt and payment of final invoices from the new Pollbook Project MITDP.**

SBE is currently working through a competing unit claim and contract claim with the previous pollbook solution vendor. Outstanding invoices will be determined and offset against any award SBE receives from its unit claim. There is \$100,000 set aside in SBE's budget to help manage any litigation processes.

- 2. SBE should comment on its contingency plan if the RFP and targeted implementation of calendar 2028 are delayed.**

SBE will utilize the current pollbook solution. In fact, SBE procured all remaining pollbooks of the make and model that is used for our elections in the United States. The solution is being maintained and checked quarterly. All necessary batteries have been replaced to ensure their ability for use in 2028 as well.

- 3. SBE should comment on (1) the decrease in estimated cost for the project and (2) the implementation schedule for the new voting system for the 2028 presidential election cycle.**

(1) SBE does not expect any cost decreases for the new voting system project. The opposite is true. SBE believes a voting system certified to the latest EAC standards, VVSG (Voluntary Voting System Guidelines) 2.0 will be at least 20-50% more than current contract. This information is based upon industry trade representatives. The delay in releasing the RFP for a new voting system occurred due to the current marketplace for voting systems not being mature or finalized. The Election Assistance Commission (EAC) has not yet certified any voting systems under VVSG 2.0 standards. Therefore, any voting system that could be awarded for use in the 2026 Election would be certified to the older standards. In order to allow for greater competition among the vendors at the 2.0 certified

standard, SBE will seek to replace and implement a new voting system for the 2028 Election.

(2) The RFP is scheduled for release in June 2025. The vendor bids, proposal evaluation, vendor selection and certification processes (including a public demonstration) are scheduled for completion by June 2026. The implementation phase including the notice to proceed, acceptance testing, and final delivery is scheduled for completion by August 2027. The 2028 primary is scheduled for spring 2028.

4. SBE should discuss its efforts to mitigate impacts of trying to implement these two MITDPs at the same time on its own staff. (NVS/PMP in 2028)

In order to mitigate the impacts on SBE staff for implementing the MITDPs simultaneously, SBE is supplementing staffing needs with contractual staff regarding the planning and implementation of these two MITDPs in 2028. The goal is to receive the new systems several months earlier than previous new systems were delivered in order to adequately provide training to SBE and LBE staff as well as prepare proper documentation for election judges and have a massive voter education campaign in advance of the 2028 election cycle. While we recognize that this is a large undertaking for SBE and LBE staff, all systems are at the necessary point of upgrade. We continue to be transparent with all stakeholders on the risks and planning needed for such a roll-out. Our teams are dedicated to seeing these tasks through to completion.

5. SBE should provide an update on the next steps for the project following the approval of a new vendor. (NCRIS)

In its third quarterly Major Information Technology Development Project (MITDP) report, the State Board of Elections (SBE) highlights ongoing efforts to ensure a smooth transition to the new campaign finance reporting system, NCRIS. SBE is working closely with the current MDCRIS vendor and the new vendor to transition operations and maintenance of the current system while importing the campaign finance data into the new program. We are mitigating any potential effects and loss of services to our stakeholders.

SBE has already started executing agreements and onboarding key personnel of the new vendor. A detailed project plan will be developed to define roles, responsibilities, and measurable success criteria.

To mitigate any potential risks, SBE will implement strategies to address potential technical and operational challenges, including system compatibility, data

migration, and regulatory compliance. Resource allocation and budget alignment will also be reviewed to support the transition. Additionally, a robust testing and quality assurance framework will be established to ensure system reliability before full deployment.

A communication plan will keep stakeholders informed through regular status updates, ensuring transparency and accountability. The go-live strategy will be carefully executed, with continuous monitoring and performance tracking to address any post-implementation concerns. A commitment to customer service and lack of disruption in access to campaign finance reports will be a driving force.

By following these structured next steps, SBE aims to minimize disruptions, enhance system functionality, and ensure a successful transition to NCRIS, supporting the integrity and efficiency of election administration.

- 6. The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) recommends adopting committee narrative requesting continued submission of combined quarterly reports on the progress of and spending on each of the MITDPs, namely the new SPM project, the new voting system, and the NCRIS project.**

SBE is happy to continue producing quarterly JCR reports. But SBE would recommend the removal of NCRIS from quarterly reporting since that project is in operations and maintenance.

- 7. Considering delays in implementing these ongoing projects and the potential strain on SBE's current staff and resources for another new project to be implemented simultaneously, DLS recommends reducing \$602,6014 in general funds budgeted in the DoIT ITIF and \$470,746 in special funds from SBE's budget to defer the VREAM project. The general fund reduction for the VREAM project will be accounted for in the analysis for F50 – DoIT.**

The electronic pollbook initiative was terminated due to vendor non-performance, while the new voting system implementation was strategically deferred to 2028 to align with forthcoming federal VVSG 2.0 EAC certifications.

Any staffing constraints are being addressed through contracted project management resources and strategic scheduling of implementations during non-election periods.

The current voter registration system, approaching twenty years in service, requires immediate modernization to address growing technical debt including security, performance, and reliability concerns. With the 2030 census on the horizon, it is imperative to implement a new system with integrated Geographic Information System (GIS) capabilities to effectively manage subsequent redistricting requirements. Given the complexity of this implementation, any procurement delays would jeopardize our ability to have a GIS-enabled system operational for post-2030 census redistricting activities. In addition, this system will provide modernized ways of managing candidate filings, creation of ballots and importing of election results as well as other critical election management tasks.

This project must not be delayed. It will take, at minimum, 3 years to plan for implementation of a new system because of the breadth of what is housed in this database. This has an agency-wide impact including the 24 local boards of elections and it is at a critical phase of needing a full modernization.