MARYLAND STATE
BOARD OF ELECTIONS
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STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS
FISCAL YEAR 2027 OPERATING BUDGET HEARING

RESPONSE TO DEPARTMENT OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES ANALYSIS

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Senator Guy Guzzone, Chair
February 24, 2026

House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Public Safety and Administration
Delegate Gabriel Acevero, Chair
February 18, 2026

Highlights

The State Board of Elections (SBE) leads a uniform election system that is considered "top down". This means that we provide regulatory oversight and guidance to our 24 local boards of elections (LBEs). We have one statewide voter registration and election administration database and one type of electronic pollbook and voting system. The State Administrator of Elections is supervised by a 5-member bi-partisan board appointed by the Governor.

Some examples generally of the role and responsibility of SBE include: Federal and State candidate filing, campaign finance including public financing programs of counties, preparing statewide procedure manuals, conducting various monthly audits, selecting and providing proper procedures for voting equipment, electronic pollbook, statewide voter registration and election administration databases and MDCRIS, preparation of all election materials used by the LBEs such as the provisional ballot application, procurement of all election equipment, voter outreach.

Each LBE has a board who has the appointing authority over the Election Directors. SBE works with the local boards to conduct evaluations and selecting new election directors, as well as making recommendations for disciplinary actions, but those actions are ultimately up to the local board to carry out.

Some examples of things that LBEs are primarily responsible for include: local candidate filing, maintenance of voting equipment, election judge recruitment, establishing an election plan which include placement of polling places, early voting

centers and drop boxes, canvassing of mail-in and provisional ballots, performing the voter registration list maintenance and voter outreach.

LBEs have their own budgets established by the county government, but some election related items are what is considered a 50/50 cost split; meaning the State pays for 50% of the expense and the rest is divided among the counties on a proportional basis. This most notably includes the cost of voting systems, electronic pollbooks and warehouse space. Election administration is a multi-million dollar budget in each county and at the State.

Under the new administration led by Jared DeMarinis, the State Administrator of Elections, SBE has been proactive in its efforts to combat mis and dis-information by providing immediate corrective statements and action instead of waiting for issues or problems to take root. SBE, as the trusted source of electoral information, prioritizes voter outreach efforts. We meet as frequently as we can with communities and groups to explain the electoral process, voting rights and how Maryland elections are safe, secure, verified and transparent.

Election officials are under attack for just doing their jobs.

The Agency always looks for new and innovative ways or methods to enhance voting and remove unnecessary barriers to voting that lead to disenfranchisement.

*SBE has been actively modernizing the Agency from the inside out. It started with the logo and motto back in 2024. The logo has 7 stars which represent Maryland being the 7th State in the Union, the circular pattern symbolizes the interconnected relationship between SBE, the government, and the citizens of Maryland and the cyclical nature of the democratic process. The motto **V**erified, **O**pen, **T**rusted, **E**mpowering (VOTE) sums up our collective mission. In presenting the information to the public, SBE cleared up the clutter and modernized our website making it phone and tablet friendly and enhanced the ability to find things fast and efficiently.*

Next, we implemented the new MDCRIS (Maryland Campaign Reporting Information System), which all the stakeholders are able to use in a more user-friendly way with clear and digestible information for easy comprehension. The conversion from the antiquated system to the new one had an aggressive timeline with conversion and decommissioning of the old system occurring under 10 months. The project converted over 4 million records and remained on budget. This aggressive timeline ensures that the new system will have sufficient time to train the treasurer and other filers for the 2026 Annual Report. It was a highly successful launch.

Upcoming is the implementation of our new electronic pollbooks and new voting system, which will be implemented in the 2028 election cycle. SBE is actively engaged in gap analysis with the pollbook vendor and preparing to start the state certification process of the new voting system which also will be RCV (Ranked Choice Voting) capable and meeting EAC VVSG 2.0 standards for 2030 and beyond.

Finally, the last piece of the modernization initiative of the Administration is a new voting registration and election administration modernization (VREAM) project. Our current system has reached its 20th Anniversary of usage and in dire need of modernization. While it still functions, as the system ages, changes and updates to meet the needs and expectation of the bills that are passed and potential redistricting are getting more expensive and time consuming. Funding and support for this process is critical to the success of future things such as the 2030 Census and subsequent redistricting that will occur.

Some highlights of activities and accomplishments of SBE from 2025 include:

Candidacy & Campaign Finance
The candidate filing deadline for the 2026 election is February 24, 2026 and fundraising is prohibited during the 90-day session. The division has been actively engaged in the implementation of the MDCRIS (Maryland Campaign Reporting Information System) and BCDS (Business Contributions Disclosure System). There are nearly 2,100 active committees with more to come as the candidate filing deadlines draws near. BCDS has over 1,400 active accounts as well.

In total, SBE collected over $54,000 in civil penalties in 2025 with Title 13 and Title 14 collecting over $330,000 combined. All of these funding programs also support the public financing programs. While only one state office (Governor) is eligible for Public Financing, Maryland is leading the country by providing it for our local offices in our six largest jurisdictions. The program is fully funded for the 2026 election cycle with the balance as of December 31, 2025 reaching over $10.5 million. This was accomplished without any interest allocations. In 2026, 5 counties - Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, Montgomery and Prince George's County will have public financing available. As of late January, there were 54 public finance candidates with 15 candidates certified and qualified across 4 counties and 1 candidate having already been maxed out.

In the future, we will look to build out our public financing team by requesting additional permanent PINs instead of utilizing contractual staff for this increasingly large role.

Cybersecurity

In late 2024, we were able to hire our own internal CISO (Chief Information Security Officer). We are grateful to acknowledge DBM's recommendation to add another member of our cyber security team to our personnel roster. These roles are an integral part of ensuring the highest levels of security for our daily operations as well as voter services based operations. We continue to be in a better posture with continued improvements following all NIST and universal security practices within the cybersecurity industry. SBE is a member of MD-ISAC (Maryland Information Sharing and Analysis Center), Cyber Threat Intelligence (CTI), MS-ISAC (Multi-State), EI-ISAC (Election Infrastructure). EI- ISAC is a critical resource for cyber threat prevention, protection, response and recovery for the nation's election offices. Mr. DeMarinis is a newly appointed member of the EI-ISAC Executive Committee.

To ensure confidence in the electoral process, SBE's autonomy in this space is vital. Our future goal is to continue to build out this security team more by requesting additional PINs.

Communications

Social Media presence remains a priority to ensure votes know their elections officials are their trusted sources for election information. Through a combination of organic and paid content, we educate voters. In addition, we have implemented a page on our new website dedicated to student and teacher voter engagement with resources for educators encouraging civic engagement, resources for students on registering to vote, becoming an election judge and getting involved in civic engagement opportunities and general resources on voter education and helpful links.

To further our goals in engaging students, we established a high school voter registration drive program challenging every senior class in Maryland's high schools to achieve a 90% voter registration rate for their class. On April 8th, the day that Maryland passed the 26th Amendment allowing 18 year olds to vote, SBE will announce who has achieved that goal and met the challenge.

In preparation for the 2026 election, SBE is in the final stages of planning for an aggressive voter outreach campaign. This includes a landing page that allows constituents to upload the election calendar, register to vote, information on the different methods of voting and how to be an election judge. We are currently running our first statewide advertising campaign to recruit election judges. SBE has also created a special "I Voted" sticker in celebration and recognition of the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

We also have partnered with UMD to build and release our own SBE app through your phone's app store this year to help people stay up-to-date on all things Maryland Elections.

It will also continue to be on our radar that we must combat mis/dis/mal information. We will utilize our online reporting portal and do proactive voter education on trusted sources.

Election Management
SBE continues to work with DGS to relinquish unused office space and security improvements to our physical location.

Turnover in the professional election officials and staff is a concern. Turnover is becoming more prevalent generally due to retirements and general threats around this career path. Election officials are under threat and attack for just doing their job. Mr. DeMarinis has worked to create a career pathway into election administration for youth. He is trying to establish a pilot program with a county board of education to develop a pipeline of talent with internships and educational courses. SBE also established the Maryland Election Administration Education (MEAE) program providing professional development to Maryland election officials as continuing education on new laws, programs and other technical aspects of the job. In 2025, Allegany, Baltimore City, Charles and Worcester County have onboarded new election directors.

SBE passed regulations to ensure minimum standards for warehouse security and space requirements for storage of the voting equipment. Many LBEs are looking to move to larger, more secure and adequate spaces in 2027 including Baltimore City.

Internal Audits
This division has supported monthly audits of the LBEs including voter transaction processing, list maintenance monitoring, and various other methods of audits within the voter registration database. Additionally, they supported our first year of performing election director evaluations. They support our post-election comprehensive audit in the upcoming election as well.

Information System and Technology
This division continues to support our various major projects that must be implemented for the 2028 election while still providing support for our current election systems for the 2026 election cycle. Additionally, they are conducting ongoing research on the use of AI and chatbots to help with productivity within the agency.

Mail-In Voting

In the 2022 and 2024 election cycles, SBE mailed paper mail-in ballot request forms to millions of Maryland voters (pursuant to 2021MGA HB1048). Paper applications will not be remailed in 2026, but they remain available as PDFs on the SBE website.

In late January, SBE administratively removed over 11,000 voters from the Permanent Absentee list. This was the inaugural implementation of [Election Law § 9-311.1](i)(3)(the voter fails to return an absentee ballot for two consecutive statewide general elections). Each of these voters were mailed an explanation of this action that includes an assurance that removal from the permanent absentee list does not change the voter's underlying registration status/eligibility.

SBE is retrofitting drop boxes state-wide to reduce confusion by some voters who mistakenly thought that their drop boxes were locked and closed. This enhancement eliminates the visible padlocks that seemingly caused the confusion. Drop boxes will continue to remain open and available 24/7 during each election cycle

Canvass Schedules will be posted to SBE's website when they are received from the LBEs. Each LBE's canvassing plan will be determined based on their experience of the quantity and timing of ballots received in each individual jurisdiction, and with SBE oversight

SBE recognizes the recent concerns about delayed USPS postmarking standards. We will emphasize to voters in our communications that they should mail their ballot back early or ask for hand-stamped postmarks at USPS retail locations or use ballot drop boxes. It should be noted that SBE and the LBEs have a very collaborative relationship with the USPS.

Policy & Election Reform

SBE implemented various legislative initiatives from the 2025 Legislative Session, notably the language assistance and risk-limiting audits (RLA). For the 2026 Election, election materials will be provided in Spanish in Anne Arundel, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Montgomery and Prince George's. Montgomery County will have 3 additional languages mandated including Vietnamese, Chinese and Amharic (Ethiopian). [Risk Limiting Audits](#) regulations and process has been established so that we meet the "gold standard" of post-election audits.

Regarding [Correctional Facility Voting](#), SBE is preparing for extensive outreach with our correctional facilities for the 2026 election cycle.

LBEs were required to submit Election Plans to SBE 7 months in advance of the election. This includes details regarding proposed drop box, early voting and election day voting locations. All were submitted and reviewed by SBE with all meeting the approval of the State Board in a recent board meeting. All locations will be posted on our website in the near future.

Legally, it has been a busy off-cycle with various lawsuits coming to SBE. SBE would be remiss to mention that our single Assistant Attorney General who provides general advice, review of all regulations, procurement guidance and various other support to the agency has been actively engaged in various lawsuits that are enormous. In the future, SBE will be requesting another AAG to support the needs of the Agency because the task is not only for a single person.

First, on April 3, 2025, nineteen states, including Maryland, filed a civil complaint in the federal district court for the District of Massachusetts against the President, the United States Attorney General, the Election Assistance Commission, and the United States Secretary of Defense. The complaint alleges, amongst seven counts, that the Executive Order imposing certain requirements on the conduct of voter registration and federal elections is unlawful. The [Executive Order](#) would require documentary proof of citizenship for voter registration in federal elections, sets a deadline for receiving mail-in (postal) ballots by election day, requires recertification of voting systems to meet updated security, accessibility and performance standards, tightens restrictions against foreign interference in elections and the order also threatens to withhold federal funding from states that do not comply.

Bryson, et al., v. Moore, et al.,
On June 2, 2025, five registered voters unaffiliated with a political party alleged that the registered voters' electoral rights, granted by the Maryland Constitution, are violated by their inability to vote in state-run, partisan, primary elections. The voters accordingly seek declaratory judgment and an injunction preventing the State from "conducting, organizing or funding State primary elections in which unaffiliated voters are prohibited from voting." On November 14, 2025, the Court granted the motion, dismissing the case in a memorandum opinion. Plaintiffs have appealed the case to the Supreme Court of Maryland.

The United States of America v. Jared DeMarinis,
On December 3, 2025, the United States Department of Justice filed suit against the State Administrator of Elections to disclose Maryland's unredacted voter registration database.

The complaint alleges that the State is in violation of a provision of the Civil Rights Act of 1960 in declining to hand over the unredacted information, as demanded.

Republican National Committee, et al. v. Jared DeMarinis.
The Republican Party and two Republican voters registered in Maryland sued the State Administrator of Elections, State Board, and the local boards of elections for Montgomery and Howard County. The complaint alleges that election officials in Maryland are violating the National Voter Registration Act ("NVRA") by failing to make reasonable efforts to remove ineligible voters from the voter registration database.

Voter Registration & Election Operations
The Agency revamped the voter registration application and election judge application last year. The provisional ballot application has also been updated to help capture important data for reporting purposes and more specific reasons as to why the individual vote provisionally. Currently, the division is developing the specifications for the RFP as a part of the VREAM project preparations as well as maintaining the current voter registration database.

We continue to work closely with all of our Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) agencies and the Electronic Registration Information Center ([ERIC](#)) so that we are provided with the most timely and accurate address information possible. These tools are integral to our voter registration list maintenance procedures.

The LBEs are recruiting for nearly 26,000 election judges this year, so we are hopeful that our ongoing recruitment campaign will help with this effort. SBE will be monitoring the progress. Additionally, LBEs can recruit Election Pages, which are 14-15 year olds interested in learning the election process.

2025
In 2025, SBE supported the Prince George's County Special Election held on March 4 and June 3, 2025. Turnout was under 15% for County Executive and County District 5. This was a vote-by-mail election which meant that all registered voters received a mail-in ballot without an application. In person voting continuously ran through Early voting and Election Day by using a vote center model. Additionally, SBE supported 12 municipal elections. SBE and the LBEs supported various local redistricting efforts in Baltimore County, Wicomico County and Frederick County.

2026

As we look to 2026, we remind everyone that Primary Election Day is June 23, 2026 and Early Voting will occur June 11-18. We expect to have over 100 early voting centers and nearly 1,500 election day polling places as well as nearly 300 drop boxes for mail-in ballots. We expect Marylanders to continue to vote early, especially by mail in the summer primary election since almost 39% of people who voted in 2024 did so by mail. We do expect the preferred method to continue to be in-person.

DLS Analysis

1. **SBE should provide the allocation of this deficiency by LBE and the factors specific to each jurisdiction's space needs.**
   SBE provides a 50% cost split with the LBEs requesting reimbursement of funds. SBE wrote regulations pertaining to this process in 2024 and is actively working with the LBEs on coming into compliance with them. Baltimore County, Carroll, Dorchester, Frederick, Harford, Montgomery, and Worcester counties have spaces that require a cost split. More LBEs are anticipated to move to more adequate spaces in 2027.

2. **SBE should comment on how it will coordinate with DoIT and ensure that DoIT maintains oversight as the NCRIS project progresses.**
   The MITDP ends 12/31/2026 and this project will officially be in the operations and maintenance phase. Historically, there is no DoIT oversight when this phase has been reached.

3. **SBE should explain the reason for the $304,943 reduction associated with the removal of DoIT oversight costs for major IT projects from LBEs.**
   DoIT no longer charges for oversight with the Major IT projects. The $304,943 reduction may be related to adjustments in MD Network pricing, which SBE does not control. Without specific details from DoIT, we are unable to provide further explanation regarding DoIT's price reduction.

4. **SBE should comment on its level of confidence that the current implementation timelines for the SPM and NVS IT projects ensure full readiness for the 2028 presidential election and whether additional operational, financial, or staffing contingencies may be necessary if delays occur in vendor performance, testing, or federal certification.**
   In order to mitigate the impacts on SBE staff for implementing the MITDPs simultaneously, SBE has increased the number of subject matter experts in our

contractual staff for assistance with the implementation phases of these projects. It would be most ideal to be granted additional new PINS to help support these ongoing projects through the implementation and maintenance phase.

Due to the accelerated timeline for implementation, we received the new systems several months earlier than in previous times in order to adequately provide training to SBE and LBE staff while simultaneously preparing 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 and modernization. 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.

The electronic pollbook initiative was terminated in 2023 due to vendor non-performance and a new pollbook vendor was selected in the Summer of 2025. Gap analysis for modifications is underway and will take several weeks for completion. Simultaneously, SBE began to work with the LBEs to gather inventory information.

The new voting system vendor was selected a few weeks ago and we have just passed the protest period, so a new vendor can be announced. In a few weeks, we will be working with this vendor to have several public demonstrations of the new system while working through the state certification process. We expect to go to BPW this summer and then will immediately work on the gap analysis and implementation. The new voting system will be VVSG 2.0 compliant by 2030.

Any staffing constraints are being addressed through contracted project management resources and strategic scheduling of implementations during non-election periods. We are hopeful that in the future DBM will recognize our very trimmed back workforce and concur with the stated needs of the agency to help support ongoing projects such as these.

As stated before, SBE is preparing a RFP for a new voter registration and election administration modernization (VREAM) project. Our current system is in its 20th year of service, any legislative mandated changes or modifications will take longer and cost more money than just procuring a new modern system. 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 critical importance to every operation. In fact, this will be our largest system to date for planning and implementation.

5. **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, NVS, VREAM, and the NCRIS project.**
   SBE is pleased to collaborate with DoIT in providing quarterly MITDP reports. However, please note that NCRIS will transition to maintenance and operations effective January 1, 2027. Accordingly, the final MITDP narrative report for NCRIS will cover the period ending December 31, 2026.