

# OFFICE OF FISCAL ANALYSIS

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SB-901

AN ACT EXTENDING TO JUNE 30, 2021, CHANGES IMPLEMENTED FOR THE 2020 STATE ELECTION AS A RESULT OF COVID-19.

As Amended by Senate "A" (LCO 8062), Senate "D" (LCO 8084)  
House Calendar No.: 455  
Senate Calendar No.: 123

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## ***OFA Fiscal Note***

### ***State Impact:***

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 22 \$	FY 23 \$
Resources of the General Fund	GF - Potential Revenue Gain	Less than \$5,000	None

Note: GF=General Fund

### ***Municipal Impact:***

Municipalities	Effect	FY 22 \$	FY 23 \$
Various Municipalities	STATE MANDATE <sup>1</sup> - Cost	Minimal	None

### ***Explanation***

**Section 1** expands the reasons for which an elector may vote by absentee ballot for any election, primary, or referendum occurring before November 2, 2021 to include the sickness of COVID-19. It is anticipated there will be an increase in absentee ballot applications as a result of this provision.

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<sup>1</sup> State mandate is defined in Sec. 2-32b(2) of the Connecticut General Statutes, "state mandate" means any state initiated constitutional, statutory or executive action that requires a local government to establish, expand or modify its activities in such a way as to necessitate additional expenditures from local revenues.

**Sections 2 and 3** require the absentee ballot inner envelope statement be updated to include "the sickness of COVID-19" and allow the Secretary of the State (SOS) to make changes to absentee voting forms and materials. No fiscal impact is anticipated as a result of such modifications.

The bill also expands violations that constitute a false statement which results in a potential minimal revenue gain of less than \$5,000 in FY 21. In FY 19 there was one violation of false statement by absentee voting, which resulted in no fines collected.

**Section 4** allows the SOS to approve and select a third-party vendor for town clerks' use in mailing absentee voting sets for elections prior to November 2, 2021. It is expected that the SOS will not be contracting with a third-party vendor for 2021 municipal election absentee ballots. Thus, this provision has no fiscal impact on the SOS. Certain municipalities will incur increased costs, as the bill expands the reasons for which electors may vote by absentee ballot to include COVID-19. The cost increase will vary by municipality and is dependent on the number of additional absentee ballots printed and mailed.

**Section 5** permits absentee ballots to be deposited into a secure drop box for elections prior to November 2, 2021. As drop boxes were ordered for absentee ballots for the 2020 primary election, no additional costs are anticipated as a result of this provision.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, this section requires municipal clerks to retrieve absentee ballots deposited to such drop boxes beginning twenty-nine days before the election and each weekday thereafter until the polls close. If said drop box is located outside of a building other than where the clerk's office is located, the clerk, or their designee, must be escorted by a police officer. Minimal costs may be incurred if town staff and local police departments cannot handle this provision with

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<sup>2</sup> The SOS ordered 200 drop boxes at a total cost of approximately \$365,000, including shipping. Costs were supported by federal CARES Act funding.

current staffing levels.

**Section 6** allows town clerks to deliver sorted and checked absentee ballots to registrars of voters before election day to begin certain pre-counting procedures. No fiscal impact is anticipated as a result of this provision.

**Sections 7 - 12** authorizes municipalities to conduct certain absentee ballot pre-counting procedures. No fiscal impact is anticipated as a result of these provisions.

**Sections 15 - 20** extends numerous deadlines and timeframes associated with processing absentee ballots and canvassing and reports the returns. No fiscal impact is anticipated as a result of these provisions.

Lastly, the bill requires the SOS to establish a pilot program to manually or electronically verify signatures on the inner envelopes for returned absentee ballots at the 2022 state election. The SOS must randomly select five municipalities to participate in the program, based on their population. A municipality may incur minimal costs to take part in the pilot program; however, as the pilot program is voluntary it is assumed that a municipality would participate only to the extent it has available resources.

**Senate "A"** extends various deadlines from June 30, 2021, to November 2, 2021, and clarifies that the timeframe extension for opening absentee ballot depository envelopes in a recanvass also applies to primaries and referenda. Senate "A" increases the cost of the underlying bill as the extension to November impacts more municipal elections. The increased printing and mailing costs will vary by municipality and will depend on the number of absentee ballot applications.

**Senate "D"** requires the SOS to establish a signature verification pilot program for absentee ballots at the 2022 state election and report on the program findings and any recommendations. A municipality

may incur minimal costs to take part in the pilot program; however, as the pilot program is voluntary it is assumed that a municipality would participate only to the extent it has available resources.

### ***The Out Years***

The fiscal impacts identified above regarding absentee voting changes only apply to elections and referenda prior to November 2, 2021, thus impacts will only be incurred in FY 21.

*The preceding Fiscal Impact statement is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for the purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.*