

ELIMINATION OF STRAIGHT-TICKET VOTING

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Senate Bill 13 as passed by the Senate

Sponsor: Sen. Marty Knollenberg

House Committee: Elections

Senate Committee: Elections and Governmental Reform

Complete to 12-3-15

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

SUMMARY:

Senate Bill 13 would amend the Michigan Election Law (MCL 168.736c et al.) by eliminating the option for voters to cast a straight ticket or split ticket in the partisan section of the ballot, and appropriating \$1 million to the Department of State to assess the impact of eliminating straight-ticket voting and perform other election-related tasks and studies.

Michigan general election ballots are composed of three sections: the partisan section, which includes candidates representing political parties, such as those running for the U.S. presidency, Congress, the State Legislature, or a university board; the nonpartisan section, which includes candidates for judgeships, municipal offices, and school boards, who do not identify with a political party; and the proposal section, which includes state and local ballot issues.

Currently, voters may choose from three options when voting the partisan section of the ticket, with the following instructions provided with their ballot:

- *Straight Ticket: Vote the party of your choice. Nothing further need be done in the partisan section.*
- *Split Ticket: You may vote a straight ticket AND vote for individual candidates of your choice.*
- *Mixed Ticket: Vote for the individual candidates of your choice in each office.*

Senate Bill 13 would **eliminate the first two options**, requiring a voter to select a candidate for each office individually. Rather than making a single selection to vote for all candidates of one political party, or selecting that party and deviating from it for a few races, as is currently the practice, a voter would now record his vote separately for each race.

Additionally, the bill would **appropriate \$1 million from the General Fund to the Department of State** for Fiscal Year 2015-2016 to do the following:

- Assess the impact of eliminating straight party ticket voting;
- Assist in ongoing compliance and fraud prevention in elections;
- Conduct thorough post-election audits of selected precincts after each election;
- Provide remedial follow-up with local election officials to correct any election errors and do correct any compliance issues;
- Audit file maintenance by local election officials; and
- Provide equipment to facilitate the integrity of the election process.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The bill would have an indeterminate fiscal impact on the state. The changes would result in increased costs to train and educate county clerks and staff on the new election ballot procedures and voting instructions. While \$1.0 million GF/GP would be allocated for this purpose, it is not known how much increased costs the Department of State would face and if the allocation would cover that cost in its entirety.

In addition, the bill would have an indeterminate fiscal impact on local governments. New instructions for ballots would have to be created, resulting in an unknown yet increased cost to each municipality. Local governments would similarly face increased training costs in educating staff and other election-related individuals such as poll workers on the new ballot changes.

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.