



Senate Bill 11, Senate Bill 19, Senate Bill 350

Universal Voter Registration Act

Election Law - Automatic Voter Registration

MACo Position: **OPPOSE**

To: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs
Committee

Date: February 18, 2016

From: Michael Sanderson

The Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) **OPPOSES** three bills before the committee to set up universal voter registration – SB 11, SB 19, and SB 350. In each case, the legislation places a very substantial administrative and cost burden onto local Boards of Election, whose functions are supported by county funding. Without state resources to offset these potentially large costs, the bills represent a major unfunded mandate onto local governments.

Universal registration, or comparable opt-out voter enrollment programs, seek to extend voting franchise as widely as possible to eligible voters. MACo does not raise policy objections to these goals – county concerns are merely practical and cost-driven.

As a rule, MACo resists state policies that trigger costly or burdensome local implementation. These bills carry substantial costs to local Boards of Election, who are charged with converting raw citizen data generated by state agencies into updated and voter-approved registration rolls. The Department of Legislative Services fiscal note on the bills indicate costs per county ranging up to hundreds of thousands of dollars per election. Under state law, counties have no choice but to fund these costs – competing for limited local funds against education, public safety, roadway maintenance, and other essential public services.

MACo suggests that if universal registration merits a top priority for state policymakers, implementing legislation should either direct state agencies to carry out these functions at state expense, or should provide the resources needed by local election boards and staff.

These bills would place a costly mandate onto county governments to carry out new state policy. Accordingly, without funds and possible technical assistance to suitably implement the bills' requirements, MACo urges the Committee to issue an **UNFAVORABLE** report on SB 11, SB 19, and SB 350.