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SENATE ANALYSIS SECTION

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Senate Bill 52 (as passed by the Senate)

Sponsor: Senator John J. H. Schwarz, M.D.

Committee: Local Government and Veterans Affairs

Date Completed: 3-16-87

RATIONALE

When preparing for primary or general elections, boards of election commissioners in townships, villages, and cities are guided by State law as to the ratio of voting machines, paper ballots, or electronic punch card devices that should be assigned to the number of registered voters in a precinct. Since the introduction of computerized voting about 20 years ago, election boards have followed the law that sets the ratio of at least one electronic voting device for every 200 voters. Now that many election boards are experienced in using computer punch cards in their localities, many municipal clerks, who are responsible for conducting elections, believe that the ratio is too low. Since punch card balloting is much faster than voting by machine, they argue, more voters can be assigned per computerized device. Some clerks would like to see the law amended to increase the number of registered voters assigned per punch card voting device in a precinct.

CONTENT

Senate Bill 52 would amend the Michigan Election Law to require the board of election commissioners of a city, village, or township to provide at least one electronic voting device for every 400 registered voters in a precinct. Currently, the ratio is at least one voting device for every 200 registered voters in a precinct.

MCL 168.796a

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on the State. The bill would result in savings to local units of government. The cost of an electronic voting device is approximately \$250.

ARGUMENTS**Supporting Argument**

The formula used to determine the ratio of voting devices to voters is not very accurate in that it is based on 100% voter turnout, which rarely occurs in primary or general elections. Instead, approximately 50% of voters actually turn out in a general election and about 25% or less for primaries. Under these circumstances, voting machines are underutilized and the low number of voters assigned to an electronic voting device does not reflect the actual usage. Therefore, the ratio of voters to a punch card voting device could be increased without delaying the voting process.

Supporting Argument

When voter registration in a precinct numbers 1,000 or fewer electors, the election law requires one "voting machine" (the type with a lever) for every 500 active registered electors. In precincts where there are more than 1,000 but less than 3,000 registered electors, the law requires at least one voting machine for every 600

registered electors. (MCL 168.661) Out of the approximately 5,900 precincts in the State during the 1986 elections, 2,537 voted by machine, 2,950 by punch card, and 417 by paper ballot. As municipalities face replacing worn out voting machines, many are considering a shift to the punch card system. The current ratio of at least one electronic device for every 200 registered voters would require many communities to purchase almost twice as many electronic voting devices than the number of voting machines they already use, in order to comply with the law. Thus, many communities would not save any money in converting to punch card voting, even though the electronic voting devices reportedly cost less than voting machines. Setting the ratio to at least one electronic device for every 400 registered voters would bring the requirements more in line with those set for voting machines. As a result, localities could switch to the punch card system, save some funds by not having to purchase extra electronic voting devices, and still accommodate the number of registered voters in their precincts.

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.

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