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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

SPONSOR Block/Boone LAST UPDATED _____
ORIGINAL DATE 3/6/2025
BILL
SHORT TITLE Reduce Early Voting Time NUMBER Senate Bill 485
ANALYST Hanika-Ortiz

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT* (dollars in thousands)

Agency/Program	FY25	FY26	FY27	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
Statewide Elections	No fiscal impact	See Fiscal Implications	See Fiscal Implications		Recurring	General Fund

Parentheses () indicate expenditure decreases.

*Amounts reflect most recent analysis of this legislation.

Conflicts with Senate Bill 487

Sources of Information

LFC Files

Agency Analysis Received From
Secretary of State (SOS)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Senate Bill 485

Senate Bill 485 (SB485) amends Section 1-6-5.7 NMSA 1978 (Election Code) to reduce the number of early voting days at a county clerk's office or alternate site from 28 days to 15 days, beginning the third Saturday prior to election, through the first Saturday prior to the election. The bill also requires those early voting sites to be open for 12 consecutive hours, from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm, instead of the existing eight consecutive hours, between the hours of 7:00 am to 9:00 pm.

Furthermore, the bill removes two existing statutory rules for county clerks: (1) the first, which required that, within 90 days of a statewide election, location and hours of early voting sites may not be changed unless SOS agrees to that in writing; and (2) the second allowed for alternate voting locations to close Sundays and Mondays.

This bill does not contain an effective date and, as a result, would go into effect 90 days after the Legislature adjourns if enacted, or June 20, 2025.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

SOS notes the requirement to stay open for early voting for 12 hours would result in substantial

overtime for election staff and county workers but did not share that cost. This bill is expected to increase the costs of elections, due to counties hiring additional staff to manage the higher voter turnout within a condensed timeframe. Additionally, polling places might require more ballot-on-demand systems to accommodate the increased volume of voters in the shorter time span, which would pose significant costs for initial purchasing and recurring maintenance. The fiscal impact of SB485 is therefore indeterminate but likely substantial.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Should SB485 pass, SOS believes it would dramatically reduce the timeline early voters have available to cast ballots in the state, potentially reducing overall turnout in New Mexico's elections. Also, in case of a natural disaster or threat, SOS would no longer be able to approve changes to early voting sites and hours of operation if the disaster or threat occurred within 90 days of a statewide election.

SOS notes that early voting was the preferred method for voting by New Mexican voters in the last two general elections: 1) in 2024; 556.4 thousand voters cast their ballots during the early voting period, and 2) in 2022; 353.6 thousand voters cast their ballots during the early voting period.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

SOS notes, according to the National Conference on State Legislatures and as of August 2024, 47 states offer early voting options, with 27 days the average length of time early voting occurs.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

SOS explains challenges in the bill related to timing:

The third Saturday prior to an election falls outside the 15-day timeline for early voting at clerks' offices in the bill. When considering dates for the 2024 general election, 15 days prior to that election would have been Tuesday, October 22nd. The third Saturday would have been October 19th, which means voting would have started on the third Saturday and then skipped Monday the 18th. It would reduce confusion among the public and voters to have the period be better defined to start on the third Saturday prior the election.

CONFLICT, DUPLICATION, COMPANIONSHIP, RELATIONSHIP

Relates to Senate Bill 487, which would establish absentee voter assistance units among other changes.

AHO/rl/SL2