

**FISCAL IMPACT OF PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

80th Oregon Legislative Assembly – 2019 Regular Session  
Legislative Fiscal Office

**Measure: SB 861 - A**

*Only Impacts on Original or Engrossed  
Versions are Considered Official*

---

Prepared by: Haylee Morse-Miller  
Reviewed by: Ken Rocco  
Date: March 20, 2019

---

**Measure Description:**

Requires state to pay postage for ballots returned by mail in Oregon.

**Government Unit(s) Affected:**

Secretary of State (SOS), Counties

**Summary of Fiscal Impact:**

Costs related to the measure may require budgetary action - See analysis.

**Analysis:**

SB 861 requires the state to pay postage costs for ballots returned by mail for all elections in Oregon.

As introduced, the measure requires the Secretary of State (SOS) to use the Business Reply Mail service for ballot returns. For each election, voters would be given a pre-addressed Business Reply Mail envelope with their ballot. When a voter submits their ballot by mail in a Business Reply Mail envelope, the voter pays no postage costs; instead, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) charges a fee to the state for each Business Reply Mail envelope received. Voters would also have the option to continue to return ballots to ballot drop sites, at no additional cost to the state.

The measure permits SOS to adopt other methods of ballot return outside of Business Reply Mail, if the method allows voters to return ballots by mail, and the costs of returning ballots are borne by the state.

**Secretary of State**

The projected cost to the state of prepaid postage for ballots varies based on several factors.

At the low end, ballot return by Business Reply Mail is estimated to cost the state \$1,585,050 General Fund in 2019-21. This assumes that:

- There are 4,733,259 ballots cast in 2019-21.
- 50 percent of those who vote in elections will return their ballots by Business Reply Mail, and 50 percent of voters will use ballot drop sites.
- Each county will need a Business Reply Mail account with USPS, which will cost \$68,040 biennially.
- Each ballot returned by Business Reply Mail will cost the state \$0.641, the current rate per piece for Business Reply Mail.
- Administrative costs of implementing this policy can be absorbed by current resources.

At the high end, ballot return by Business Reply Mail could cost the state \$3,102,059 General Fund in 2019-21. Costs to the state would increase based on factors such as increased voter turnout, an increase in the percentage of voters who choose to return ballots by mail, the number of elections held, number of ballot cards and size of the ballot.

This measure is included in the SOS agency budget request for 2019-21 in Policy Option Package 207.

Counties

The cost of this measure to counties statewide is anticipated to be \$83,733. Counties will need to destroy ballot return envelopes that are obsolete once this bill takes effect on January 1, 2020.