Consolidated Elections:
Budget Impacts

Presentation to the Joint Committee: August 20, 2025

Voter Registrars Association of Virginia

VOTER REGISTRARS ASSOCIATION OF VIRGINIA

- Membership association for general registrars and staff of 133 localities
- Mission: Promote integrity, transparency, accessibility, and impartiality in running Virginia elections

MY BACKGROUND

Eric Olsen
Director of Elections
Prince William County

- 15 years in elections for DC, MD, and VA
- Received multiple national/state awards
- Representing VRAV in this forum

Election Funding Environment & Statistics

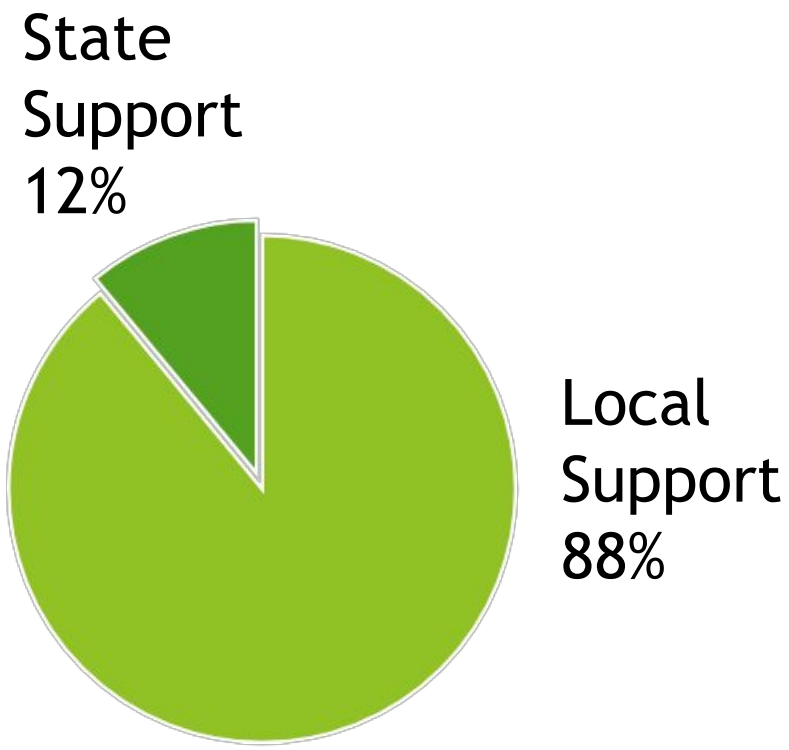
Consolidated Elections: **Budget Impacts**

LOCAL ELECTION COSTS

$99.1 million total expenditures (FY24)

- Local Support: $80.9 million
- State Support: $18.2 million
  - Primary Reimbursement = $7.0 mil
  - Registrar/EB Support = $11.2 mil

LOCAL ELECTION FUNDING



LOW EXPENDITURE LEVELS

- Support of local election offices accounts for **0.248% of locality expenditures** (FY24)
  - $1 for every $403 spent
- Direct support of local election offices accounts for only **0.036% of state expenditures** (FY24)
  - $1 for every $2,778 spent

HIGH RETURNS

- Roughly **half of residents** interact with the Office of Elections in a typical year
  - *PWC: 2nd most interactions of any county agency*
- Voting is consistently rated as a **highly favorable activity**
  - *PWC: 94% satisfactory experience*

Point #1:

Proper funding of elections not only protects the most foundational American right, but perhaps the most frequent and positive interaction government has with its citizens…and it costs almost nothing.

EXPANDED MANDATES & COMPLIANCE

- Early Voting for 45 days
- Mail Voting (no excuse absentee)
- Increased Compliance Standards
  - Annual Security Standards (LESS)
  - Annual ADA survey requirements
  - Expanded training
  - Expanded reporting requirements

MORE EXTERNAL DEMANDS

- Expanded **public education** demands
- **Misinformation** and disinformation
- Explosion in **FOIA requests**
- **Officer parity** focus

FUNDING CAN BE INADEQUATE

- Some localities do not provide adequate budget and staffing
- Inadequate funding mechanisms and reimbursements
- Small localities have to complete many similar functions to large ones

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POLITICS

This year's presidential primaries cost localities about $4 million more than the state will cover

In some places, the state will cover the whole cost. But some localities are finding the state is only covering about one-quarter of the expense.

Point #2:

Increased voting convenience, compliance standards, and transparency are popular and broaden access to voting, but they require resources to accomplish in a landscape increasingly filled with misinformation.

Locality Election Budget Details

Consolidated Elections: **Budget Impacts**

LOCALITY VARIATION

Size	#	Voters	Budget (Avg)	FTE
XL	6	250K+	$4.30 mil	14-17
L	9	100-200K	$1.65 mil	6-8
M	19	40-90K	$0.81 mil	3-5
S	99	Under 40K	$0.34 mil	1-3

LOCAL ELECTION FUNDING

- Between $10-30 per voter/year depending on many factors with the most important being locality size
- Does not include variable costs like special elections, recounts, etc.
- Periodic capital investments in election equipment/facilities

VARIANCE IN LOCAL COSTS

- Administrative structure of county
- Early voting sites and hours
- Mail voting participation levels
- Types of activities supported (outreach)
- Full-time or seasonal staff
- Special populations served
- Geographic size

Point #3:

Differences in locality structures, costs, and demographics means the impact of consolidating elections would see similar variability at the local level.

How Would Consolidated Elections Change Funding Needs?

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FISCAL PLANNING

Current Election Schedule

- ✔ Fixed Costs
- ✔ 2 Elections most years

Consolidated Election Schedule

- ✔ Fixed costs
- ✔ Primary or General – 1 each year

TYPES OF COSTS

Fixed Costs
Required annual expenditures

Election Costs
Costs incurred only when elections are scheduled

FIXED COSTS

- Salaries/benefits of employees
- Capital expenditures (facility, equipment)
- IT infrastructure/licensing
- Office supplies
- Voter registration activities (year round)
- Administration (HR, budget)

ELECTION COSTS

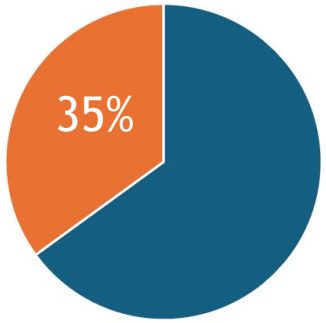
- Ballot printing
- Mail voting supplies, postage, and labor
- Equipment programming/delivery
- Election officer payments
- Candidate management
- Seasonal staffing

EXAMPLE BUDGET, FY24

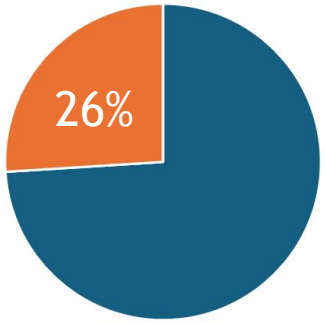
Fixed Costs	Total	Notes
Salaries	$ 1,510,615	FT/PT employees, temps, Board
Benefits	$ 566,253	FICA, retirement, insurance
IT/Facility Costs	$ 455,805	Software/hardware, leases, repairs
OT/Hol/Wknd Pay	$ 149,772	Req for deadlines, weekend/eve work
Misc. Fixed Costs	$ 208,054	Office supplies, non-election postage
	$2,890,500	**65%**
Election Costs	**Total**	**Notes**
Officer Payments	$ 582,632	Election Day, Early Voting, etc.
Contractor services	$ 552,458	Ballot printing, tech support, transport
Seasonal Employees	$ 288,038	Temp staff used during elections
Mail Voting	$ 59,159	Postage/supplies for mail voting
Misc. Election Costs	$ 94,418	Supplies, equipment, forms, copies
	$1,576,705	**35%**

ELECTION COSTS
BY # OF VOTERS

~300,000



~75,000



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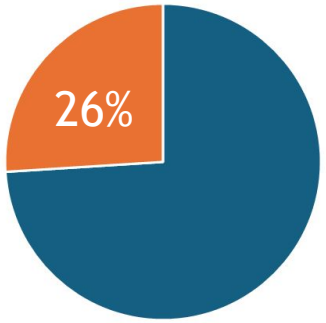

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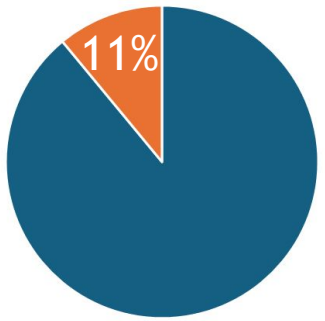

POTENTIAL "SAVINGS"

- Fixed costs are the largest area of local expenditure and would see minimal savings each year
- The smaller the locality, the larger portion of the budget is fixed costs
- Election costs would drop each year
- Estimated difference statewide = $15.1 million (FY24)

Point #4:

Consolidated elections would cost less money, but the savings might be lower than expected and diminish as the locality gets smaller in population.

Overall Considerations

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CONSOLIDATION ADVANTAGES BUDGET IMPACT

- Reduced annualized election costs
- Some costs and processes related to planning, training, and compliance could be shifted to non-election years
- Savings re-invested could better meet voter needs and public demands

CONSOLIDATION CONCERNS: BUDGET IMPACT

- Budgets still catching up to increased convenience/compliance demands
- Some election costs could increase (example: multi-page ballots)
- Special elections costs would increase
- May lose knowledge and efficiency with a possible shift to more seasonal staff

MITIGATION STEPS TO ENSURE SMOOTH IMPLEMENTATION

- Minimum locality staffing levels
- State funding to cover increased compliance and voter education needs
- Modifications to early voting
- Review of special election legislation

Point #5:

VRAV does not take a position on consolidated elections. Careful planning, modification of ancillary laws, and proper fiscal support would ensure potential implementation and could alleviate both existing and potential challenges.

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