

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE  
First Reader

Senate Bill 670 (Senator Kagan)  
Education, Energy, and the Environment

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**Election Law - Local Board of Elections Employees - Authority at Polling Places**

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This bill provides a local board of elections employee with authority at a polling place similar to the authority of election judges, including by authorizing a local board of elections employee, while serving in a polling place, to (1) keep the peace and (2) order the arrest of any person who breaches the peace, breaches any provision of the Election Law Article, or interferes with the work of election judges. A police officer who is on duty at a polling place must obey the order of a local board employee and is fully protected in making any arrest under such an order as if acting pursuant to a valid warrant. The bill also provides a local board employee authority to protect the rights of, and manage the access and conduct of, challengers and watchers in the polling place, similar to the authority of election judges. **The bill takes effect June 1, 2026.**

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** None.

**Local Effect:** The bill does not directly affect local government finances.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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**Analysis**

**Bill Summary:** The bill authorizes a local board of elections employee, while serving in a polling place, to (1) keep the peace and (2) order the arrest of any person who breaches the peace, breaches any provision of the Election Law Article, or interferes with the work of the election judges in conducting the election and carrying out their assigned tasks.

The bill also authorizes a local board employee to protect a challenger or watcher in the exercise of their rights. A local board employee is not required to admit a challenger or watcher to a polling place before the polls open if the challenger or watcher was not present at the polling place at least 30 minutes before its opening. A local board employee may require challengers and watchers to leave a polling place before it opens if the local board employee has reason to believe that the presence of the challengers and watchers will prevent the timely opening of the polling place.

The bill establishes that a local board employee may exercise the above authority independent of an election judge assigned to the polling place.

A police officer who is on duty at a polling place must obey the order of a local board employee and is fully protected in making an arrest under such an order as if the officer received a valid warrant to make the arrest.

The bill authorizes a local board employee to eject a challenger or watcher who violates specified prohibitions related to actions by a challenger or watcher. A local board employee may limit the number of nonaccredited challengers and watchers allowed in the polling place at any one time for the purpose of challenging the right of an individual to vote. A nonaccredited challenger or watcher must leave the polling place as soon as a local board employee decides the right to vote of the individual challenged by the challenger or watcher.

**Current Law:** A police officer on duty at a polling place must obey the order of an election judge at the polling place and is fully protected in making an arrest under an order of an election judge as if the officer had received a valid arrest warrant. A police officer on duty must also protect a challenger or watcher in the discharge of the challenger or watcher's duties.

State law allows for challengers and watchers who are registered voters and designated by SBE, a local board, a candidate, a political party, or any other group of voters supporting or opposing a candidate, principle, or proposition on the ballot to be present at a polling place. A person's right to vote may only be challenged on the basis of their identity.

Challengers and watchers may enter a polling place a half hour before polls open and remain in the polling place until the polls are closed and election judges leave the polling place. A challenger or watcher may not attempt to (1) ascertain how a voter voted or intends to vote; (2) converse in the polling place with any voter; (3) assist any voter in voting; or (4) physically handle an original election document. An election judge may eject a challenger or watcher who violates any of those prohibitions.

An election judge may permit an individual who is not an accredited challenger or watcher to enter the polling place to challenge a voter, after which the individual must leave the polling place. A majority of election judges may limit the number of nonaccredited challengers and watchers allowed in the polling place at any one time and all restrictions on the actions of an accredited challenger or watcher apply to a nonaccredited challenger or watcher. A nonaccredited challenger or watcher must leave the polling place as soon as a majority of the election judges decides the right to vote of the individual challenged by the challenger or watcher.

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### **Additional Information**

**Recent Prior Introductions:** Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

**Designated Cross File:** HB 1001 (Delegate D. Jones) - Government, Labor, and Elections.

**Information Source(s):** Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Charles, Dorchester, and Garrett counties; Maryland State Board of Elections; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - February 23, 2026  
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