

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2008 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 1371 (Delegate Bronrott, *et al.*)
Rules and Executive Nominations

General Assembly - Internet Webcasting of Committee Meetings

This bill requires the General Assembly to provide live and archived video and audio webcasts of all meetings of standing and statutory committees, subcommittees, and other public legislative bodies subject to the Open Meetings Act. Closed sessions may not be broadcast. Archived meeting files must be retained and available to the public for four years.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures by the General Assembly would increase significantly in FY 2009, primarily to equip several additional rooms commonly used for hearings at a cost of at least \$200,000 each. In addition, ongoing costs could increase annually beginning in FY 2009 by at least \$25,000 to purchase additional computer storage capacity to retain archived footage for four years and by \$15,000 for every additional 100 simultaneous feeds above the system's current capacity of 200 feeds.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: There is no statutory requirement to provide webcasts of any General Assembly proceedings. However, the General Assembly's web site provides live audio-only webcasts of all Senate and House of Delegates floor sessions. Webcasts are archived and available to the public on the web site for one year.

The Open Meetings Act generally requires that a public body, including the General Assembly and its committees, meet in open session, and that it give reasonable notice in writing before it meets in either open or closed session. The public is entitled to attend any open meeting of a public body. The Act lists 14 conditions under which a public body may meet in closed session, including to discuss private personnel matters, consider the investment of public funds, obtain legal advice, and conduct an investigative proceeding.

Background: The Department of Legislative Services' Office of Information Systems advises that committee hearing rooms in both the House and Senate office buildings are wired and equipped to transmit streaming audio and video webcasts of committee proceedings. The built-in cameras are automated and programmed to show whoever is speaking, presuming the speaker activates his or her microphone before speaking and the audio system is set to the correct setting. However, the Joint Hearing Room, subcommittee rooms, and other meeting rooms are not wired and would require significant capital investment to equip them to transmit webcasts.

State Expenditures: General fund expenditures by the General Assembly could increase by an estimated \$25,000 annually to add storage capacity to retain archived footage of committee and subcommittee meetings for four years. In addition, DLS's current server capacity provides 200 simultaneous live webcast feeds. Every additional 100 feeds would cost approximately \$15,000 annually, and each additional room that is not equipped for webcasts would cost at least \$200,000 and possibly more. Precise estimates of the cost of installing comparable audio/visual systems in these rooms are not available. However, OIS advises that the cost of equipping each of the House hearing rooms in 2004 was almost \$350,000, including 5 cameras, 36 microphones, and a webcast processor. The Joint Hearing Room is of comparable size, so the cost would be similar, not accounting for inflation. Subcommittee rooms would require less equipment than full committee rooms and, therefore, could be somewhat less expensive.

Additional training for committee counsel and support staff would be necessary to ensure that the audio and video systems in each hearing room are set to the appropriate settings. That training can be provided by OIS with existing resources.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Legislative Services

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