

Estimated Costs to Implement the SAVE America Act in Washington State

Prepared jointly by the Washington Secretary of State's Office and the Washington Association of County Auditors | March 9, 2026

Implementation of the SAVE America Act would require significant operational, technological, and administrative changes to Washington State's election system at both the state and county levels. Based on preliminary analysis, the **overall estimated election cost increase for the 2026 midterms would be \$35.7 – \$39.3 million statewide**. That includes \$26.2 – \$28.2 million for one-time implementation and \$9.5 – \$11.1 million additional ongoing operational cost. In a presidential year, the additional ongoing operational cost would be higher, \$12.25 – \$14.65 million.

The size and scale of change is similar to changes brought with the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). [Congress appropriated \\$3 billion](#) to implement HAVA in the early years (approximately \$5 billion today), with Washington state receiving \$60 million. SAVE has a much shorter time frame for required implementation, and introduces new federal requirements related to documentary proof of U.S. citizenship for voter registration, identification requirements for voting by mail, expanded voter verification processes, and administrative responsibilities for election officials. These changes would require significant operational adjustments, rapid upgrades to state systems and voter registration infrastructure, and expanded voter education efforts.

At the state level, costs are driven by system upgrade needs across multiple agencies to comply with changes to the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA), modifications to the statewide voter registration database and online registration systems, and development of a large-scale voter education campaign. Additional technical integration with the federal Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements Program (SAVE) would also be required.

At the county level, election offices would face substantial new operational demands. Counties anticipate need for additional year-round election staff, expanded vote center capacity to accommodate voters presenting proof of citizenship and identification, additional ballot materials to preserve voter privacy when identification is submitted with mailed ballots, and increased ballot processing costs due to new verification steps.

COST DETAIL

Given the scope of the changes and the short implementation timeline contemplated by the legislation, both state and county officials anticipate that the operational and financial impacts would be substantial and ongoing. These statewide cost projections are preliminary and provide a rough order of magnitude. Actual costs will vary depending on final federal guidance, voter behavior, the timeline for implementation, and other factors.

Initial Implementation – Counties and State

State (\$24.2M)

- State agency voter registration system upgrades (NVRA agencies) - **\$20M**
- VoteWA database modifications for citizenship documentation - **\$237,000**
- Online voter registration system updates - **\$237,000**
- Statewide public education campaign - **\$3.6M**
- Integration with federal SAVE verification system - **\$118,500**

Counties (\$2M-\$4M)

- Vote center equipment and setup
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Ongoing Operating Costs - Counties

Annual base cost (\$4M)

- County election staff - **\$3.9M**
- Voter registration notice mailings - **\$16,500 – \$101,000**

Additional costs during federal elections

Congressional midterm (\$5.5M-\$7.1M)

- Vote center operations **\$2.4M-\$4M**
- Ballot processing, ID verification **\$2M**
- Ballot envelope requirement **\$1.1M**

Presidential election (\$8.25M – \$10.65M)

- Vote center operations - **\$3.6M-\$6M**
 - Ballot processing, ID verification - **\$3M**
 - Ballot envelope requirement - **\$1.65M**
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