

# Taking Blount off ballot seen as threat to voting

State testifies in suit  
filed by senator's rival

8-26-98  
By CAITLIN FRANCKE  
SUN STAFF

The state election board said yesterday in an Annapolis courtroom that striking Sen. Clarence W. Blount's name from the ballot in the September Democratic primary could threaten proper administration of the election.

The state and Blount are co-defendants in a lawsuit that challenges Blount's residency in Baltimore's 41st Legislative District, which he has represented in the General Assembly for 27 years. The state is part of the suit be-

cause the plaintiff, Del Frank D. Boston Jr., seeks to have Blount's name taken off the ballot.

The state has not taken a position on the question of Blount's residency but does say that removing his name would create difficulties. Three weeks might seem like a long time before the Sept. 15 election, but "that is a nanosecond for us," said Assistant Attorney General Kathleen Hoke Dachille, who represents the State Administrative Board of Election Laws and the Board of Supervisors of Elections of Baltimore City.

Removing Blount's name "could pose a serious threat" to the proper administration of the election, Dachille said.

Blount's residency is being challenged by Boston, his electoral opponent. Boston alleges that Blount lives in Pikesville, not in

the predominantly black 41st District, which stretches roughly from downtown to Northwest Baltimore.

Blount has acknowledged that he spends most nights in Pikesville but maintains that a family home on Copley Road is his legal residence. Blount, 77, is expected to be the first witness today when the trial continues in Anne Arundel County Circuit Court.

Sam McAfee, a private contractor who oversees operation of the voting machines for the city, testified yesterday that the 126 machines in the 41st District could be altered as late as Sept. 11. Still, that could pose problems; the new machines are more complicated and would require re-programming, McAfee said.

A critical part of the electoral process is the public inspection of voting machines to make sure they are working, McAfee said. That generally occurs about 10 days before the election, he said, and if they were not inspected, he said, "some of the integrity of the election may be questioned."

Under cross-examination by Steven Allen, Boston's attorney, McAfee said that the inspection could be done later than the set date of Sept. 4.