

## **FY16 CAPITAL BUDGET TESTIMONY**



presented by

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to the

**Maryland Senate – Capital Budget Subcommittee**  
**James E. DeGrange, Sr., Chair**

and the

**Maryland House – Capital Budget Subcommittee**  
**Adrienne A. Jones, Chair**

### **Mission Statement**

*MPT's mission is to **educate, entertain and enlighten** the people of Maryland and beyond through creative programs and services of the highest quality, delivered through traditional public broadcasting and new multimedia technologies. MPT's commitment to excellence, innovation, diversity, and the values of Marylanders is essential to this mission.*

### **FY16 Capital Budget appropriation for MPT**

The governor's FY16 capital budget includes \$400,000 to replace both the uninterruptible power supply (UPS) at MPT's Hagerstown transmitter and to deal with aging connection equipment at all six of the station's transmitters.

The UPS is a vital component of the digital transmitter at our Hagerstown site. The UPS supplies consistent power to the transmitter even in the face of electrical variances (such as brown-outs or outright power failures). The UPS device protects tube-type transmitters, such as that at Hagerstown, that are susceptible to unstable power situations.

Connection equipment comes into play as MPT sends its broadcast signal from our Owings Mills hub to all six statewide transmitter sites. The capital appropriation will enable us to replace aging, terrestrial microwave equipment with fiber optic signal distribution, a lower-cost and much more reliable transmission method.

The \$400,000 capital budget inclusion for FY16 follows on the heels of a similar capital appropriation in FY15. As we pointed out then, the FY15 allocation was the first MPT capital funding in roughly 15 fiscal years. We are grateful for this second consecutive appropriation which certainly will go a long way toward sustaining and improving MPT's service to Marylanders.

## **A legacy of service: entertainment, education, public safety and citizenship**

Maryland Public Television is a service organization. When our founding legislation was enacted by the legislature in 1966, Maryland lawmakers undoubtedly had no idea what form that service would take.

In the intervening years, MPT has developed a service model that focuses on entertainment, education, public safety, and citizenship. We are the agency that delivers to Marylanders an array of information, engagement, and entertainment that genuinely promotes the well-being of our citizens and our communities.

Because of the support of the people of Maryland, we relate to all our stakeholders with a service – not sales -- mentality. And our stakeholders comprise many groups within Maryland. They are TV viewers and “just plain citizens” ... students and teachers ... businesspersons and nonprofit groups ... artists and analysts ... news junkies and medical specialists ... senior adults and children in childcare ... even elected officials. When service is the mission, the test of whether we’re delivering the goods is in the response of citizens and the endorsement of civic, education, governmental, and organizational leaders.

## **Television – and more than television**

“Television” is our middle name, and it’s the primary way in which most citizens relate to MPT. We affirm that – unlike most network and cable fare – MPT’s TV programming truly educates, enlightens, and entertains. It does not insult the intelligence of those who tune in. We believe that the Emmy® Awards we earn every year – six in FY14 alone – and the increasingly favorable Nielsen ratings and the voluntary financial contributions of 67,000 households, hundreds of businesses, and dozens of foundations all mean that MPT’s television service is respected, sought-after, appreciated, recognized, and rewarded for its quality.

As we come to the Maryland legislature in pursuit of FY16 funding from the State of Maryland, several important facts about MPT as “television” demand emphasis:

- ✓ **MPT is a television station with a free statewide broadcast signal.** No other broadcaster in Maryland can make that claim or take on that significant responsibility. Indeed, 1.9 million viewers tuned in to MPT monthly in FY14. More than 100,400 visitors saw MPT through our online video player in the same 12-month period, up from 56,000 in FY13. Other viewers watched our programs on our YouTube channel. Thanks to new technologies, citizens are able to watch MPT on mobile devices and video-on-demand systems provided by cable services whenever they wish.
- ✓ **As a state licensee of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), MPT is a conduit for disseminating quality PBS programming** to all corners of Maryland along with our own locally produced shows. Why is this important? Over the course of a year, 90 percent of all U.S. television households (and 217 million people) watch PBS. PBS remains one of this nation’s most trusted brands, and MPT is, simply put, the conduit for PBS in Maryland.
- ✓ **MPT covers Maryland like no other medium headquartered here or elsewhere.** From our weeknight Public Square programs (*State Circle, Outdoors Maryland, Direct Connection, Your Money & Business*) to Maryland-focused documentaries (*Marvin Mandel: A Complicated Life ... Downee Ocean, Hon!*), MPT produced more than 247 separate local programs in FY14. Collaborations with other state agencies (especially our 27-year partnership with the Department of Natural Resources to create *Outdoors Maryland* and new relationship with the Department of Agriculture on the series *Maryland Farm & Harvest*) underscore our focus on life in the Free State. If Maryland Public Television does not tell Maryland stories, what broadcaster will?
- ✓ As recently as September 2014, MPT put Maryland front-and-center in a national PBS spotlight when 96% of America’s TV-viewing households received the MPT-orchestrated Great Performances telecast *Star-Spangled Spectacular: Bicentennial of our National Anthem* from Baltimore’s Inner Harbor. Cumulative viewing of the production hit 1.88 million persons, exposing citizens nationwide to the historic contributions, tourism opportunities, and beauty of the State of Maryland.

If television were all that MPT was about, we might simply request continued funding to make quality TV accessible to Marylanders. We'd commit to keeping the six transmitters running and six large towers secure. We'd simply pledge to keep producing Maryland-centric shows to supplement PBS fare. If MPT meant only TV, we'd keep serving underserved groups -- such as rural populations or those unable to afford cable, satellite, or mobile transmission -- and keep covering local and state issues that affect citizens and communities. We would continue to make sure that all Maryland citizens enjoy the same access that they've had to public broadcasting since we went on the air in 1969.

However, state officials dating back to the 1960s wisely decided that MPT would be -- in the words of a former advertising slogan here -- "bigger than television." And so we are.

## **Beyond television**

MPT is also a free classroom, a free stage for the arts, a convener of concerned citizens, and a trusted source of important information -- all beyond the television screen.

### **Education**

From its earliest days, MPT has recognized an educational mission. Today, we consider ourselves to be a Maryland educational institution that reaches into far more communities and homes and schools and facilities than do all of our colleges and universities combined.

MPT's education initiatives continued to focus on the development and delivery of high-quality products and services for preK-12 schools, caregivers, communities, and families. A key focus in education is the creation and delivery of professional development and the integration of innovative multimedia resources into curriculum-based learning.

During the 2013-2014 school year, roughly 1,000 educators and childcare providers took one or more of course offerings for licensure and/or certification in early childhood or K-12 education.

The centerpiece of MPT's educational outreach is *Thinkport*, a web portal housing a dynamic collection of interactive resources, multimedia, online learning adventures, curriculum-based lesson plans, and innovative technology tools. *Thinkport* made its debut in 2003. In FY14, *Thinkport* recorded 17.9 million page views and 1.7 visitor sessions -- remarkable statistics that underscore that this centerpiece of MPT's education enterprise is vibrant, sought-after, and highly useful to those who've come to rely upon it.

At the close of FY14, there were 48,000 registered users of *Thinkport*. These are overwhelmingly educators, but children, parents, and childcare providers also are users. By registering (for free!), an individual has access to the following tools that the casual visitor to the *Thinkport* website doesn't see: a classroom website builder, online storage space to save and share resources, and a lesson builder. Educators also come to *Thinkport* for top-notch online courses and diverse professional development opportunities.

*Thinkport* users can also take advantage of an online newsletter, and 5,000 of them did in FY14 as subscribers to the free weekly publication. Some 3,400 people follow MPT's education activity via social media.

Continuous growth and technological innovation are the hallmarks of *Thinkport*, as it remains a mainstay and progressive platform for learning for educators, childcare providers, parents, and students.

## Outreach

MPT service is by no means relegated to whatever content is broadcast on our three TV channels or posted on our websites. Community engagement – literally, our being out and about – is crucial to MPT’s service, deepening our understanding of community issues and helping us learn about where, when, and how MPT can help. Here are some community engagement highlights from FY14:

**Supporting the bay.** The Chesapeake Bay Week® volunteer-a-thon – MPT’s annual environmental volunteer drive called “Concert for the Chesapeake Bay” – raised volunteer hours via commitments from individual citizens and community groups to support environmental/nonprofit organizations. This year’s 90-minute live broadcast (April 2014) was simulcast on NPR affiliate WTMD (89.7 FM) for the third time. Each year, the volunteer-a-thon gives a growing number of families, individuals, clubs and organizations the opportunity to come together to make a positive impact on the environmental health of our communities.

**Returning veterans.** More than 200 people attended a special screening and panel discussion of *Coming Back with Wes Moore* at the Walters Art Museum in May 2014. This documentary series featured stories of currently returning military veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan, and it was narrated by Baltimore native and author Wes Moore. Additionally, MPT hosted an online social screening of the second episode of the series, featuring a live chat with one of the veterans featured in the documentary. MPT partnered with the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs to promote these events and the series premiere.

**Financial literacy.** MPT’s financial literacy efforts were re-branded in October 2013 as *Smart Thinking About Your Money*. Highlights of the revamped initiative included:

- *Investbusters*, a web-original series comprising eight witty and fast-moving episodes that debunk common myths about investing.
- *You Can Afford College*, the live November 2013 broadcast which this year yielded viewer questions from 134 phone calls, 16 emails, and 69 tweets as viewers inquired about higher education financing options. Fifteen financial aid professionals from local higher education institutions staffed our phone bank, complemented by live interviews with local higher education experts. The Maryland Higher Education Commission served once again as primary partner for this annual broadcast.
- A redesigned website, including the re-formatted *Ask Karen Gibbs* personal finance blog.

**Student video.** Twenty-five students in Randallstown High School’s Radio & Television program created videos to encourage MPT viewers to take the Gettysburg Address challenge: learn, recite, and upload a video performance to [learntheaddress.org](http://learntheaddress.org). More than 40 videos were collected from around the state, including several from MPT’s on-air talent pool. Compilation spots of these videos were produced to air around the premiere of Ken Burns’ *The Address* in March 2014.

**Shakespeare.** In MPT’s ongoing partnership with the Chesapeake Shakespeare Company (CSC), in FY14 we were awarded a second grant from the Shakespeare Uncovered National Community Outreach Initiative – this year to conduct community activities around the broadcast premiere of *The Hollow Crown*. MPT and CSC co-hosted an exhibit tent at the 2013 Baltimore Book Festival in the Mount Vernon area and entertained visitors with staged readings and sword combat demonstrations from famous Shakespearean plays.

**Downton Abbey.** MPT celebrated the fourth season premiere of the celebrated *Downton Abbey* series in January 2014 with two public screening events, complete with costume contests and “selfie” photos in front of a large photo backdrop of Highclere Castle. More than 1,000 enthusiastic fans were treated to sneak previews of the new season at the Music Hall at Strathmore in Bethesda and the Gordon Center for Performing Arts in Owings Mills.

**Tours.** MPT made the MPT facility more of a public space for our communities by hosting roughly two dozen group tours throughout the year for people ranging from scout troops and service organizations. MPT representatives also

traveled to events and to group meetings around the state at the invitation of others to serve as guest speakers, panelists and emcees

### Online

Marylanders increasingly rely on the content they find on [www.mpt.org](http://www.mpt.org) – our 19-year online presence. In FY14 alone, some 410,276 unique visitors came to our website and executed 1.84 million page views. What information have they sought? The complete daily schedule for our three separate MPT channels (MPT-HD, MPT2, and V-me) ... online (on-demand) video ... in-depth program information ... web-exclusive content ... and more. All MPT-created websites accounted for 24.1 million page views in FY14.

### Public Safety & Communications for Local / State / Federal Agencies and Municipalities

Maryland Public Television spends \$3 million annually to operate, maintain, and repair six full-power transmission sites located in communities across the State of Maryland.

MPT towers, erected between 1972 and 2005, bear sophisticated transmission equipment to deliver the station's television broadcast signals to homes, businesses, and institutions throughout Maryland and into contiguous states and the District of Columbia. But these same towers also carry equipment that belongs to a variety of governmental agencies and units. MPT makes its towers available for such public safety and communications transmissions without cost to the agencies involved.

Here is a rundown of current MPT tower "tenants":

#### **Owings Mills, MD**

- Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS)
- Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA)
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Maryland Transit Authority (MTA)
- "Maryland FIRST," the new statewide 700 MHz Radio System (with future locations at our Frederick, Hagerstown, and Oakland sites)

#### **Annapolis, MD**

- State Highway Administration (SHA)
- Maryland State Police
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

#### **Salisbury, MD**

- Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

#### **Oakland, MD**

- Frostburg State University Radio Station 91.9 WFWM
- Garrett County Emergency Management (high-band repeater for emergency fire/rescue dispatch)
- Garrett County Government
- Garrett County Sherriff's Office
- Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS)

#### **Hagerstown, MD**

- Antietam Radio Club
- Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS)
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio
- Washington County Board of Education
- Washington County Government
- Washington County Health Department
- Washington County Highway
- Washington County Sanitation
- Washington County Sherriff

#### **Frederick, MD**

- Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- State Highway Administration (SHA)

MPT's six TV towers play a public safety role, too. We're part of Maryland's emergency communications system and are working on a state public safety project (Maryland Statewide Public Safety Communications System) that will position equipment on select towers. We provide Emergency Alert System messages under the FCC's Warning, Alert, Response Network Act (WARN) to cellular providers in our coverage area.

## **The economic challenge**

MPT and its sister stations across the nation are challenged today. The economy of the U.S. and the pocketbook economies being practiced in homes from coast to coast are combining to threaten our ability to deliver on the mission we've adopted.

Better than most Marylanders, you know how we are funded:

- ✓ Less than one-third of our funding comes from you – representing the State of Maryland – in the form of an annual operating budget.
- ✓ We earn the remaining two-thirds by aggressively seeking members, donors, underwriters, and grant-makers and convincing them to support us. This two-thirds of voluntary support – called “Special Funds” – results from strategic direct mail solicitations, on-air pledge drives, partnerships with educational and other institutions, corporate support, and relentless pursuit of grants -- local, state and federal.

It is important that we continue this vital work for Maryland's citizens simply because – if Maryland Public Television does not educate, convene and engage our citizens – what institution will provide such service across our state? In fact, what institution can? MPT alone has the statewide reach and the multi-media platform that impact the quality of life of the people of Maryland. No newspaper nor website nor blogger nor university nor institution covers Baltimore City and 23 counties with uplifting and inspiring stories and educational and community outreach as does MPT.

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## **Conclusion**

I hope that all the initiatives that I've cited give evidence of a vibrant, local, multi-platform institution that not only comes today to express what it needs but also comes to deliver a promise.

We commit to you that MPT and its people will continue to work hard to continue to be relevant to and have favorable impact on the local communities we serve. We know that by partnering with other institutions and organizations, MPT extends the reach and value of its partners as well its own. So even those gifts encouraged by pledge drives or earned through sponsorship sales are truly pass-through gifts to the homes, schools, and institutions MPT reaches.

MPT remains a point of entry to all the distribution platforms with content that matters to Maryland citizens. Surely, we'll continue to train teachers, students and childcare providers; to engage active volunteers by the droves; to serve up marquee programming viewable on 80-inch screens or tablet computers.

MPT will always be the place to go for the familiar faces of personalities whom you know as on-screen neighbors and on-site experts -- the destination for educators, political leaders, CEOs, Moms and Dads, the curious, the early-adopters, and the brave-of-heart who use on-air and online MPT resources for lesson plans and the lessons of life.

Today MPT provides its services with fewer resources than ever before. We have reduced our staff by more than one-third in the last decade or so. We've slashed paychecks, departmental budgets, maintenance projects – in short, everything that could be slashed without impacting negatively the local efforts and valued services for Maryland communities that I've spoken of today. This is why capital appropriations are so vital to our continued service.

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As all the foregoing attests, Maryland Public Television is continuing to do important service work for the community -- and is doing it very well. As noted above, we reduced our staff by 44% (112 positions) since 2002. Today, we operate on a very thin edge. Consider this "history" of state appropriations for Maryland Public Television:

**FY06 actual -- \$11,640,713**  
**FY10 actual -- \$9,420,209**  
**FY11 actual -- \$8,453,981**  
**FY12 actual -- \$8,181,565**  
**FY13 actual -- \$7,774,728**  
**FY14 actual -- \$7,559,509**  
**FY15 appropriation -- \$7,883,800**

Of course, the pattern of decreasing allocations -- a 32 percent drop from FY06 through FY14 with a small bump-up in the FY15 appropriation -- is a familiar one in state government which is challenged to do more with less. At a multi-media operation such as MPT, it is difficult to absorb annually the size of cuts reflected above -- particularly when such reductions come at a time when other revenue streams are negatively impacted by overall economic conditions.

### **Recommendation**

The inclusion of the above-referenced capital item in the governor's plans is a most welcome development and, we believe, recognition of the significant service that MPT provides to the citizens of Maryland

**Concurring with the recommendation, MPT expresses its appreciation to the governor and to Department of Budget and Management for the FY16 capital budget appropriation.**

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