

**Testimony of
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to the

**Maryland House – Appropriations Committee
Education & Economic Development Subcommittee
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and the

**Maryland Senate – Budget & Taxation Committee
Education, Business & Administration Subcommittee
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MPT: Marking 50 years of service to Marylanders

Maryland Public Television is an essential resource for the citizens of Maryland, playing an important role in civic leadership, education, and public safety here in the Free State.

Where *civic leadership* is concerned, Maryland Public Television treats its viewers as citizens rather than consumers. So, in broadcast, online, and face-to-face ways, we engage these same citizens to add to their quality of life and quality of knowledge. In the *educational* arena, Maryland Public TV certainly functions as the state's largest classroom as well as a critical resource for teachers, parents, and daycare providers statewide. In *public safety*, MPT plays a vital role in homeland security and emergency communications thanks to our strategically placed transmission towers.

What makes all this possible, of course, is the funding we receive from the State of Maryland along with the support of grant providers, corporations, and individual citizens who support and endorse our activities. Thanks to the state and other funders, MPT remains Maryland's only statewide broadcaster, committed to community service and to upholding our mission to education, enlighten, engage, and entertain our fellow citizens.

An MPT snapshot

- state agency established in 1966 by an act of the Maryland legislature
- had its on-air debut on October 5, 1969
- serves as Maryland's only statewide TV broadcaster; maintains six transmission towers that effectively cover the state
- operates four channels: MPT-HD, MPT2/Create, PBS KIDS, and NHK WORLD-JAPAN
- produced and aired 200 original local productions in FY18
- earned 22 awards and designations in 2018
- has approx. 1.3 million total monthly viewers of MPT-HD and MPT2/Create (Nielsen)
- is 7th largest in total revenue of 156 Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) member licensees
- maintains three websites that collectively garnered nearly 29 million pageviews in FY18
- has nearly 60,000 voluntary contributors/donors in 30-plus states and Washington, D.C.
- employs full-time staff in 145 approved positions
- operates on a \$31.4 million budget (FY18)

Addressing a crisis

During the past year, Maryland Public Television continued to focus attention on the opioid addiction crisis and its impact on communities across the state. Through original content, education programming, and a strengthening of our partnerships with key stakeholders, we demonstrated a commitment to continuing the fight against the ravages of opioid addiction.

MPT again offered viewers an Addiction & Recovery Week program block in February 2018 and 2019. Building on the success of the network's initial effort in 2017, during which we debuted the documentary *Breaking Heroin's Grip: Road to Recovery* on 36 television and radio stations, the 2018 edition featured programs that spread important medication safety information while reporting gut-wrenching stories from the frontlines of the opioid epidemic and highlighting breakthroughs in the fight against it. The 2019 Addiction & Recovery Week, which concluded with Saturday's presentation of *Fighting Opioids Today: Maryland Communities*, continued to focus on opioid addiction while also extending our scope of coverage to include gambling and other substance abuse issues facing our citizens.

Throughout the year, MPT-produced television and digital content profiled numerous public health and safety officials on opioid addiction-related topics to increase awareness of the issue and continue educating citizens on the dangers of opioids and step being taken to address this public health crisis.

Critical to this effort was our partnership with the Maryland Department of Health (MDH). MPT personnel worked in close collaboration to successfully execute two statewide MDH public awareness campaigns. One titled "Anti-Stigma" focused on helping victims of the opioid crisis overcome the shame that is often associated with addiction. Another, titled "Talk to Your Doctor," encouraged viewers to take greater control of their healthcare decisions by being proactive with medical professionals about medication options.

Local stories, national impact

It's widely recognized that MPT is the conduit for all the wonderful programs that come from PBS – quality productions including *Victoria*, *Poldark*, *NOVA*, *Nature*, and *Frontline*, to name a few. Yet, MPT is a producer, too, of many programs that Marylanders watch in impressive numbers. Series such as *State Circle*, *Direct Connection*, *Maryland Farm & Harvest*, *Outdoors Maryland*, *Chesapeake Collectibles*, and *MotorWeek* are just some of the myriad shows produced by MPT's talented men and women. In fact, a recent tabulation of MPT productions over the years found more than 800 unique productions – documentaries,

series, specials, and even a popular variety show named after our beloved state crustacean – have been developed and disseminated by MPT over its first 50 years of operations.

MPT peers in the broadcasting industry cast a vote for quality when they judge MPT worthy of regional Emmy® Awards. In FY18, MPT earned 20 nominations and captured six awards for its television work, including a highly coveted award for outstanding community service. Emmy Awards are only one category of formal, industry recognition of achievement in bringing PBS and Maryland stories to the people of our state.

The financial picture

The State of Maryland annual appropriation provides 26 percent of our budget. We earn the other 74 percent by seeking members, sponsors, work-for-hire clients, and pursuing other fundraising opportunities.

Therefore, State of Maryland support is essential to the success of Maryland Public Television, primarily helping to ensure that Maryland citizens enjoy universal access to educational programming and informative entertainment that stands apart from the fare on commercial television.

But state support of MPT goes further. It is critical in driving this local station’s public service missions of *education, public safety, and civic leadership* discussed above.

State support provides a significant payoff: Research verifies that the American people overwhelmingly think public investment in public television is money well spent, providing cost-effective solutions to some of the nation’s most important challenges and generating a very substantial return on investment. There is no reason (or evidence) to suggest that Maryland citizens feel differently than their national counterparts about the return on investment that public television – and MPT in particular – provides.

All days are school days at MPT

As noted above, Maryland Public Television certainly functions as the state’s largest classroom. On the TV screen, what MPT provides in the way of early childhood educational programming – the origin and hallmark of public television – has helped hundreds of thousands of the youngest Marylanders get ready to learn in school and succeed in life. But it’s also helped close the achievement gap between rich and poor kids. Still, MPT has more educational value than in the content of TV programs alone.

Hundreds of Maryland teachers serving roughly one million Maryland students (including those home-schooled) use MPT's *Thinkport* portal in combination with PBS LearningMedia as classroom aids. *Thinkport* has been infused with roughly \$30 million of federal and grant funds since its 2003 inception, and this crucial (but nonrecurring) funding overwhelmingly has benefitted Maryland's educational community. The PBS LearningMedia component (made available free through MPT) adapts public TV programming – plus content from the Library of Congress, National Archives, NASA, and more – to create curriculum-aligned, interactive digital learning objects for K-12 classrooms.

And there's still more. Through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's *American Graduate* initiative that MPT aggressively embraced, our station has helped reduce the high school drop-out rate and shed intelligent light on this thorny issue.

Similarly, through MPT's long-standing partnership with the Maryland Department of Education, we have created, managed, and distributed accredited online courses to nearly 12,000 enrolled K-12 teachers and childcare workers

For the non-students and non-teachers among us, MPT's educational concentration enriches the lives of everyone, everywhere, every day, for free, with the best history, science, cultural, and public affairs programming on the air.

Keeping citizens safe

In public safety, MPT plays a vital role in homeland security and emergency communications right here in Maryland.

Maryland Public Television spends \$3 million annually to operate, maintain, and repair six transmission towers located in communities across the State of Maryland. These towers (erected between 1970 and 2005) bear sophisticated transmitters 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.

For example, the Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems (MIEMSS), the Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), the Maryland State Police, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Weather Radio, sheriffs' offices in numerous counties, and the State Highway Administration are just a few of the

governmental groups whose communications depend on the presence and maintenance of MPT towers.

What's more, as part of its broadcast signal, MPT provides messages of the Emergency Alert System (EAS) on all its channels. Further, MPT transmits to mobile devices all EAS signals under the FCC's Warning, Alert and Response Network Act ("WARN Act"). In addition, MPT works with State of Maryland on Maryland FiRST, a statewide radio network linking state and local first responders; this is part of the state's public safety project (the Maryland Statewide Public Safety Communications System).

In summary, public TV stations such as MPT are the backbone of the Emergency Alert System through which the president of the United States can alert the American people to national emergencies. Our spectrum is critical to the Wireless Emergency Alert system that sends cell subscribers geo-targeted text messages in the event of a local emergency. MPT resources enable state and local law enforcement and first responder agencies to communicate with one another and with the public in times of emergency. Our datacasting technology helps law enforcement deal with challenging situations ranging from school shootings (providing blueprints of schools in real time to improve emergency response) to crowd control at major public events.

Civic leadership as a priority

As cited above, where civic leadership is concerned, Maryland Public Television treats its viewers as citizens rather than consumers. Accordingly, MPT acts as a version of C-SPAN for State of Maryland government, airing candidate debates during election cycles; producing local public affairs programs such as *State Circle*; creating hundreds of hours of local history and cultural programming which no one else produces; and partnering with prominent state agencies to help them tell *their* stories.

In a special, in-depth way, MPT turns its attention annually to one resource shared by all Marylanders: the Chesapeake Bay. Each year in April, MPT's Chesapeake Bay Week[®] program lineup highlights important aspects of the Bay, from wildlife conservation to infrastructure development and many topics in between. Over the past several years, we have produced and aired a *Chesapeake Bay Summit* as part of our Chesapeake Bay Week programming to review progress and challenges in creating and maintaining a healthy bay.

As is clear from the information above, MPT had long since established its legacy in creating thought-provoking television when, in 2015, it launched MPT Digital Studios to apply our civic leadership mission to the digital age. Through MPT Digital Studios, we introduce

content produced for and distributed over digital platforms – short-form videos that extend the quality of public TV for citizens to access on desktop or mobile devices. All this comes from a locally operated, locally focused public TV licensee that’s been delivering the service to Marylanders since 1969. If MPT were not taking the broadcasting and online lead in civic discourse and community engagement, is there any expectation that commercial television would fill the gap?

Getting out Maryland’s message

The three-part mission of education, public safety, and civic leadership could constitute a full slate of deliverables for MPT – or any of the nation’s 161 public TV stations. Yet, there is a *fourth* element that is particular to Maryland Public Television and that needs to be shared.

Through its programming and via year ‘round activities throughout the state, MPT is a booster of all things Maryland, and our platform as Maryland’s only statewide broadcaster gives us the ability to convey Maryland messages far and wide. It’s well known that MPT’s signal covers the state, but significant viewing (and, indeed, voluntary paid membership) comes from residents of the District of Columbia and all contiguous states (Delaware, Virginia, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania). Because of this reach, MPT is an important player in tourism and economic development – and, in fact, is poised to do even more in this regard if and when funding becomes available.

As a megaphone for Maryland, MPT partners with selected state agencies to help them deliver the messages important to their missions. With the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, we produce and deliver the *Outdoors Maryland* series (since 1988). Partnering with the Department of Agriculture, we cover Maryland’s No. 1 industry via the popular series *Maryland Farm & Harvest* (since 2013). More recently, MPT teamed up with the Department of Health to tackle the opioid addiction issue through the landmark production *Breaking Heroin’s Grip: Road to Recovery* (aired by nearly 40 separate radio and TV stations in the mid-Atlantic region) and, over the last two years, through a full slate of programming to support the governor’s call for action on the opioid crisis. And just last weekend, amid our third annual Addiction & Recovery Week block of programming, MPT broadcast *Fighting Opioids Today: Maryland Communities*, a documentary we presented in close collaboration with the Opioid Operational Command Center and the Maryland Department of Health’s Behavioral Health Administration.

Our service to state agencies can also be seen in work for the Maryland Insurance Administration to reinforce its communications with Maryland citizens. Our longtime affiliation with the Maryland Department of Education has already been discussed above, but

our newer alliance with the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs is already a strong and productive one owing to our four-year initiative called *MPT Salutes Vietnam Veterans*. The same is true for the Maryland Department of Commerce where, in recent years, collaborative efforts have helped put the state on the map regionally and nationally.

Working partnerships with Maryland agencies are mirrored in the private sector. MPT provides the stage for Maryland corporations and small businesses through our weekly telecast of the series *Your Money & Business* (since 2003). Hospitals and healthcare experts are especially visible in our series *Direct Connection* (since 2001), a mainstay in MPT's public affairs lineup.

More tools for greater reach

MPT has a 50-year track record as a resource for Maryland and Marylanders. In the first four decades of its life, MPT was most closely identified with the TV screen. However, in the past decade, more technological tools have enabled MPT to be bigger than television.

Substantial communications for, by, and, with Marylanders occur through the station's websites that account for some 30 million pageviews annually. The MPT app enables Marylanders to interact with their public TV station on tablets and smart phones. Indeed, a TV set is no longer needed to view MPT content owing to the digital-first productions discussed above that can be seen by thousands of web viewers thanks to MPT Digital Studios. For instance, the initial Digital Studios offering, *Voices of Baltimore: Black, White & Gray*, covered the turmoil and aftermath of the April 2015 riots in Baltimore while more recent offerings have featured, among other topics, a look at Maryland's wonderful state parks, Historic St. Mary's City, and NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory.

MPT's YouTube channel, podcasts, and social media outlets all enhance the civic discourse, entertainment, and story-telling that earlier was relegated to a non-mobile TV set in the home. Today, MPT truly is everywhere.

What does MPT cost the State of Maryland?

As mentioned, roughly one-quarter of MPT's annual revenue comes in the form of a state appropriation. That translates to approximately \$1.40 per Marylander per year. MPT then leverages that investment to source and secure other funding (aka "special funds"). For every dollar of the state's \$8 million appropriation, MPT returns \$2.40.

Nationally, the Government Accountability Office has concluded that a federal investment is essential to public TV's universal service mission, and we believe that elected officials and agencies at all levels in Maryland similarly recognize MPT's high-quality, low-cost contributions to in education, public safety, and civic engagement.

Similarly, MPT actually saves the State of Maryland money by some practical provisions for the people and groups we serve. Dozens of state entities occupy spots on MPT transmission towers for their cellular equipment – all without charge. MPT routinely performs work-for-hire production projects at fees far lower than state agencies would pay for conventional commercial production of their videos, PSAs or other visual communications.

MPT response to analyst recommendation

The legislative analyst has recommended that MPT's general fund support for FY20 be reduced by \$1,058,210. The stated reason for the proposed reduction was that the "agency was unable to provide a reasonable plan for how the additional funding would be spent."

MPT agrees with the recommendation about the reduction of funds but disagrees with the rationale for the reduction. As explained below, MPT believes the budgeted \$1,058,210 was based on a miscalculation. This is not a case of absent plans for spending the money – far from it. The network has documented, longtime needs that such an appropriation would address. But in this case, the funding amount was derived from an inaccurate budget calculation, and MPT acknowledges that computational error.

The funding formula of SB1034 has served MPT well since it was enacted by the General Assembly in FY17. The formula creates a mandate by which MPT receives funding based not only on the State's budget but also in the event that MPT's federal funding (including the Community Service Grant, or CSG, from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting) declines. If the CSG MPT received two years ago (or in this case FY18) is lower than the amount that was budgeted for MPT in that year, then two years later (or in this case FY20) MPT should receive the difference in the funds.

As part of the 2018 budgeting process, MPT inadvertently provided a budget number for the anticipated CSG revenue that was substantially higher than it should have been. MPT corrected the number, but, unfortunately, our later correction which revised the CSG appropriately downward was not inserted into the State's allowance for FY18. As a result, that incorrect number was used to calculate MPT's FY20 appropriation that resulted in the \$1,058,210 additional funding.

We remain grateful for the additional \$256,229 MPT received in the FY20 budget by the SB1034 formula tied to State revenue increases. It is our plan to apply any additional funding to remedy the situation of holding positions vacant to save salary dollars and to reduce, if only by a small handful of days, our excessive schedule of on-air pledge (fundraising) dates.

On this second point, “pledging” is a necessary part of life for all public television stations. But, at a time when public TV stations nationwide conduct on-air pledge for an average of 65 days per year, MPT “pledges” 97 days. While the upside of pledging is that it provides a short-term financial infusion, the downside is that it alienates our core audience, citizens already frustrated that regularly scheduled programs are interrupted. As viewers tune out because of a high volume of pledge days on our MPT-HD and MPT2 channels, the audience for our broadcast programs drops, and our membership numbers (and revenue) decline. In an attempt to ameliorate the increasing frustration of viewers who protest our “constant begging” – and they certainly do let their feelings be known to us – we seek to use a portion of these dollars to reduce pledge interruptions during FY20. We believe this is a smart, strategic long-term goal, and MPT is doing all it can to provide our viewers with the best content possible.

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