

**Testimony of  
Larry D. Unger, President & CEO  
Maryland Public Television**

to the

**Maryland House – Appropriations Committee  
Education & Economic Development Subcommittee  
March 1, 2021**

and the

**Maryland Senate – Budget & Taxation Committee  
Education, Business & Administration Subcommittee  
March 1, 2021**



This year, MPT dispenses with the usual wide-ranging discussion of its service to Maryland as it considers the State of Maryland operating budget appropriation for the upcoming fiscal year.

Instead, MPT requests the committees' attention to the negative impact of the proposed Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2021 (BRFA) contained in HB589 / SB493.

*The proposed BRFA removes permanently funding protections passed overwhelmingly by the Maryland Senate and House to prevent rollercoaster funding for MPT.*

In 2017, the Maryland General Assembly took significant steps to establish a predictable budget level for MPT and to eliminate budgets which forced MPT to take backward steps. This was accomplished in SB 1034, passed in both the House and Senate with support from both Democrats and Republicans. Here is a concise look at what they did:

**SB 1034 benefits to MPT:**

- (1) ensures governor's annual budget bills for upcoming fiscal years funds MPT at level no less than current year plus
- (2) ensures that MPT appropriation increases by same percentage as state's projected General Funds revenue for upcoming fiscal year
- (3) protects MPT from losses due to federal funding decreases

**Why SB 1034 revenue matters:**

Until 2017 enactment of SB 1034, MPT had experienced regular yearly reductions in its state appropriation. (From FY05-FY16, overall state funding dropped \$3.3 million or 38%.)

At the same time, federal funding was decreasing by an average of \$3 million annually (FY05-FY20) due to declines in federal grant opportunities. Fortunately, SB 1034 allowed MPT to gain some lost ground fiscally and reach a more stable, predictable level of funding in the face of these revenue declines.

SB 1034 provides MPT with some level of insulation from inflationary costs increases and upticks in PBS dues, employee benefits, and TV equipment maintenance – all significant MPT budget items.

SB 1034 allows the network to get back to an adequate level of funding after more than a decade of annual appropriations cuts. The loss of that revenue from the state would now be disastrous and would jeopardize the network’s online educational services including programs to assist teachers in providing virtual education. Further, the loss of these funds threatens the production of such public affairs productions as *State Circle* and *Direct Connection* that provide our citizens with Maryland-centric news and information.

**Bottom line:**

To save positive provisions of SB 1034 – emphatically approved by the legislature in 2017 – the following language in its entirety must be removed from BRFA 2021 [ HB 589 / SB 493 ] since the fiscal years referenced effectively would end the program now:

**The Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2021 (BRFA)  
HB 589 / SB 493**

**The following BRFA language – unless deleted – would nullify SB 1034 and cause significant harm to Maryland’s only statewide broadcasting network.**

2 24–204.  
 3 (d) (1) [Beginning in] FOR fiscal [year] YEARS 2019 AND 2020, [and for each  
 4 fiscal year thereafter,] the Governor shall include in the annual budget bill a General Fund  
 5 appropriation to the Commission in an amount not less than the General Fund  
 6 appropriation for the current fiscal year as approved in the State budget as enacted by the  
 7 General Assembly and increased by the percentage by which the projected total General  
 8 Fund revenues for the upcoming fiscal year exceed the revised estimate of total General  
 9 Fund revenues for the current fiscal year, as contained in the December report of estimated  
 10 State revenues submitted by the Board of Revenue Estimates to the Governor under §  
 11 6–106 of the State Finance and Procurement Article.

12 (2) (i) [In] FOR FISCAL YEARS 2019 THROUGH 2021, IN addition to  
 13 the appropriation required under paragraph (1) of this subsection, if the actual amount of  
 14 special funds in special fund code R15304 Community Services Grant and CPB Grant in  
 15 budget code R15P00 Maryland Public Broadcasting Commission received by the

16 Commission in the second previous fiscal year is lower than the amount that was budgeted  
17 for the Commission as approved in the State budget as enacted by the General Assembly  
18 for the second previous fiscal year, the Governor shall include in the annual budget bill, for 19 the upcoming fiscal  
year, a General Fund appropriation to the Commission in an amount  
20 not less than the difference between the actual funds and the budgeted funds.  
21 (ii) The general funds appropriated under subparagraph (i) of this  
22 paragraph may not be included in the calculation under paragraph (1) of this subsection  
23 for any subsequent fiscal year.

**MPT thanks the committee for its attention to this request.**