

Department of Information Technology
Fiscal Year 2025 Capital Budget

TESTIMONY OF
Katie Savage, Secretary

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee
Capital Budget Subcommittee
The Honorable Craig J. Zucker, Chair
February 13, 2024

House Appropriations Committee
Capital Budget Subcommittee
The Honorable Mark S. Chang, Chair
February 12, 2024

Good afternoon, Chairman, and members of the committee. I am Katie Savage, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Information Technology. I am joined today with Norman Farley, Chief of Public Safety Communications. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to provide this testimony to the committee. I would also like to thank Yashodhara Rai, our Department of Legislative Services Analyst, for her efforts and support.

The Department of Information Technology has one Capital project to review, and that is the Maryland First Land Mobile Radio System. Maryland FiRST is a mission critical public safety radio system that supports the Governor's goal of creating a safer Maryland. It does so by providing public safety users with a reliable, secure, statewide and interoperable communications system. It is a lifeline for public safety.

I am very happy to report that 2023 was a successful year of major milestones for Maryland FiRST. These achieved milestones included completing Phase 5 in April of 2023. Phase 5 was the last of 5 geographical implementation phases, which includes Montgomery, Prince George's, Calvert, Charles and St Mary's Counties. This completed the scope of the original project. Maryland FiRST is now truly statewide.

Another completed milestone, Air to Ground went live for operational users in May 2023. Air to Ground is used by both commercial and State medevac helicopters and provides direct communications, coordinated through MIEMSS/SYSCOM for medical consults and aircraft command and control.

Fulfilling its mission to be statewide and interoperable, Maryland FiRST has become the “go to” interoperability communications system for the Maryland first responder community and surrounding jurisdictions.

Each month, the Maryland First system averages over 3 million “push to talks” transmissions from radio users, which is up from 2.5 million per month average in 2022. Additionally, the system now supports over 115,000 members of the public safety community, which includes approximately 30,000 primary and 85,000 interoperable users from over 100 different State agencies, county, Federal and neighboring State jurisdictions. All Maryland counties, Baltimore City, Annapolis and Ocean City, are either Primary or Interoperable Users of the system.

While the core project has been completed, work is on-going to migrate the first 4 phases to an Ethernet backhaul network, a system design that replaces an aging backhaul technology and increases the system’s overall resiliency. The Ethernet migration project is well underway and planned to be completed in September of 2025.

Additionally, the Maryland First project team continues to add new radio sites to the system as part of its Coverage Improvement Program. The goal of the Coverage Improvement Program is to address radio coverage gaps identified through testing and by operational users throughout the State. In 2023, a new radio site was added in Davidsonville in Anne Arundel County, and 2 additional sites at Greenbrier State Park (Washington County) and Swallow Falls (Garrett County) went live in January 2024.

Our FY 2025 Capital Budget request is \$17,880,000. This funding will support four major efforts: new radio sites, fiber, geographically diverse control sites, and in-building amplifiers. We support the budget analysis presented and its recommendation.

As part of the Coverage Improvement Program, we are requesting funds for an additional four radio sites. The new sites are planned for the following locations:

- New Germany State Park (Garrett County)
- Fire Station 30 (Montgomery County)
- Barton (Allegany County)
- St Michael's (Talbot County)

The FY 2025 funding requests continues to build upon the State's fiber network which supplements, or in some cases replaces, Maryland FiRST's reliance upon microwave within the network which can pose system challenges during poor weather conditions such as storms and extreme heat. Four (4) new fiber paths are in the plan for construction in FY 2025 Statewide. Those paths are as follows:

- Sudlersville to Galena (Queen Anne's to Kent Counties)
- Carole Highlands By-Pass (Prince George's County)
- Kent 911 Center to Still Pond (Kent County)
- Private Road to Big Savage Tower (Allegany County)

As introduced in FY 2024, the FY 2025 funding request continues to support the addition of Geographically Diverse Control Sites to the network. The

Maryland FiRST system is comprised of 22 cells, each with a single primary site that is responsible for controlling and managing information for that specific cell, while also connecting that cell to the rest of the network. Adding a second and geographically located prime/control site within each cell provides redundancy in the event the primary controlling site is disabled due to planned or unplanned events including power and backhaul outages, reducing the risk of a large-scale radio coverage outage directly impacting operational users. The FY 2025 budget request supports funding to add a geographically diverse control site within Anne Arundel County.

Bi-Directional Amplifiers (also referred to as “BDAs”) add supplemental radio coverage within smaller, discrete geographic areas. BDAs can be implemented as a cost-effective solution to solve radio coverage gaps and/or enhance radio coverage in key areas including schools, State Parks, tunnels, and critical government buildings. The implementation of in-building amplifiers is an effort that involves coordination with many State and local entities working in tandem to identify and prioritize specific targets of opportunity. The MD FiRST capital budget request supports funding adding 2-3 BDAs sites each year. The locations of the BDA’s are driven by Maryland first responders who have identified specific buildings of concern within their communities.

We thank the Committee for its consideration and ask that our FY 2025 Capital Budget request be approved. My staff and I stand ready to answer your questions.

Thank you.