



Maryland DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

Maryland Department of Planning Fiscal Year 2025 Operating Budget Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis

**Senate Budget & Taxation Committee – Public Safety, Transportation and the
Environment Subcommittee
Senator Sarah K. Elfreth, Chair
February 7, 2024**

**House Appropriations Committee
Delegate Ben Barnes, Chair
February 8, 2024**

Personnel Data

The agency should comment on efforts to fill the 4 positions that have been vacant for over one year and how agency operations have been impacted by the vacancies.

MDP Response: Our dedicated staff absorbed the duties assigned to the vacant positions, while our new secretary and agency executive team completed the agency reorganization. This required shifting of duties within the department and other matters receiving less priority. There have been several meetings with the leadership of the Department of Budget and Management to accomplish this reorganization and ensure that positions align with the duties required as part of job descriptions. This process evolved in the first half of FY24 and has now been finalized. Three of the positions are now in the process of being reclassified as a result of the reorganization and interviews are in process for the accountant position.

Maryland 250 Commission Reestablished with New Direction

MDP should comment on these proposed partnerships and if they will still be pursued by the new leadership of the MD250 Commission. The agency should also discuss the planned uses for the \$457,400 in remaining available funds. The Department of Legislative Services (DLS) recommends reducing the budget for this program by \$250,000 in fiscal 2025, given the remaining available funding and uncertainty surrounding previously anticipated expenditures.

Planning Response:

Overview of MD 250 Commission Status and Administration Transition

After the 2022 election, once it was known that there would be a new administration, there was a one-year transition with no meetings of the Commission, and a gap and turnover in staffing. In April 2023 a new Director was hired; in July 2023 a new Executive Order with an all-new perspective was signed, rescinding the 2021 Executive Order and Commission; in November 2023 the new Commission was appointed; and in December 2023 the new Commission and working groups met for the first time. With the new Commission there is an all-new perspective of inclusivity; an expanded timeline before, during, and in the 250 years since the Revolutionary War; three themes – history, civics, and service; and specific reference to telling stories of indigenous land and people, and free and enslaved African Americans.

Maryland is getting a late start on the 250th in comparison to most other mid-Atlantic states. This late start impacts funding and the timeline and feasibility of raising private funds, making state funding even more essential. An additional \$250,000 in state funding is important to the Commission, and makes a statement about Maryland's commitment to the 250th.

Previous funds and the additional \$250,000 budgeted will be spent carefully, and in a planned way. It is a priority to follow policies and procedures, to allow the Commission to do its job and make decisions on funding priorities, and to be good stewards of taxpayer money.

Proposed Partnerships

With a new perspective, the partnerships identified by the previous 250th Commission are no longer being pursued. With new leadership, new ideas, and new projects, different partnerships are now being explored – with state ethnic Commissions, local 250th committees and Commissions throughout the state, heritage areas, higher education institutions, libraries, departments and agencies within state government such as the Archives, Maryland Historical Trust, the Maryland State Arts Council, Department of Commerce, Department of Service and Civic Innovation, and the Department of Veterans Affairs, and existing coalitions, associations, and organizations connected to the themes of history, civics, and service.

Planned uses for existing funding

With the transition between administrations and Commissions, the new Director was conservative in making decisions about spending Commission funding at a time when there was no Commission. Essential expenditures during the transition were for branding, a website, an intern, and travel (booths at MML and MACO, mileage and limited expenses for in-state travel, and travel to a national convening of 250 directors). Anything non-essential was delayed.

Currently planned:

\$47,000/ year (to start) for contractual support, which over a 3-year period will cost upwards of \$140,000

\$15,000 total for a multi-year web hosting agreement and for website pre-and post launch support

\$4,500 for travel to three national convenings of 250 directors, in Williamsburg, Philadelphia, and Alabama.

Additional expenditures planned but not yet priced:

3. Booths at MML, MACO, and other public events.
4. A platform (hardware and software) to collect stories from Marylanders at public events.
5. Marketing materials including signs, tablecloths, a rack card, logo flags for display on Main Streets, college campuses, etc., and other 250th branded items.

The new Commission and working groups are just beginning their work on a plan of additional ideas, some which will require funding, some which will be funded from other sources, for example a Maryland 250 Fellows Program with the Department of Service and Civic Innovation.

Some state 250th Commissions have launched small grant programs for the 250th to provide seed money in support of local and site-based 250th initiatives. With this funding, the Commission will be able to consider such a program in Maryland, without it such a grant program is unlikely.

Operating Budget Recommended Actions

1. Delete \$250,000 in funds budgeted in fiscal 2025 for the Maryland 250 Commission. Approximately \$457,000 in funding appropriated in prior years is still available for this purpose.

Planning Response: The Department respectfully disagrees with this recommendation.