

Department of Information Technology
Fiscal Year 2026 Capital Budget

TESTIMONY OF

Melissa Leaman, Acting Secretary

Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Capital Budget Subcommittee

The Honorable Craig J. Zucker, Chair

February 11, 2025

House Appropriations Committee

Capital Budget Subcommittee

The Honorable Mark S. Chang, Chair

February 10, 2025

The Department of Information Technology (DoIT) has one capital project to review, and that is the Maryland First Statewide Interoperable Public Safety Communications System (Maryland FiRST). 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 proven lifeline for Maryland public safety users and is the “go-to” interoperability communications system for Maryland’s first responder community and surrounding jurisdictions.

Maryland FiRST had another successful year in 2024. From day-to-day operations, to the call by Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) dispatchers to close the Francis Scott Key Bridge, Maryland FiRST has proved its mettle. Each month, the Maryland FiRST system averages over 3.2 million “push to talk” transmissions from radio users performing public safety activities. Additionally, the system now supports over 122,000 members of the public safety community, which includes approximately 32,000 primary and 90,000 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.

With the addition of a new radio site located in downtown Washington, D.C., funded through a grant provided by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, Maryland FiRST has expanded its reach beyond its borders to support Maryland first responders. The goal of the Maryland FiRST DC radio site is to support Maryland FiRST users and provide interoperability and redundancy during national special security events and emergencies

occurring within the National Capital Region (NCR). The Maryland FiRST radio site in DC went live on November 4, 2024 and immediately provided support for Maryland first responders supporting the November presidential election, the January 6th certification of electoral votes, President Jimmy Carter’s funeral, the presidential inauguration, and the recent Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA) plane crash tragedy.

Our fiscal year (FY) 2026 capital budget request is for \$14.909M. This request includes funding for the ongoing work associated with the Coverage Improvement Program (CIP), and the Resiliency Improvement Program (RIP).

As part of the on-going work within the CIP, we are requesting funds for three (3) additional radio sites. The new sites are planned for the following locations:

- Cambridge (Dorchester County)
- Burtonsville (Montgomery County)
- Accident (Garrett County)

Funding is also requested for additional bi-directional amplifiers (BDAs) to add needed radio coverage within smaller, discrete geographic areas. BDAs are a cost-effective solution to solve radio coverage gaps and enhance radio coverage in key areas including schools, state parks, tunnels, and critical government buildings. The FY 26 request supports funding two to three (2-3) new BDAs sites. The locations of the BDAs are driven by Maryland first responders who have identified specific buildings of concern within their communities. To date, BDA installations have been completed at Greenbrier State Park, a Talbot County elementary school, and two (2) Kent County fire

houses. Work will start shortly to add BDAs at the Court of Appeals building in Annapolis.

Funding for the RIP will continue to build upon efforts to add resiliency and redundancy throughout the radio network and improve performance. The FY 2026 request includes funding for the addition of three (3) large but critical fiber paths in southern Maryland (Indianhead to Smallwood, Smallwood to Douglas Point, and Lusby (Rt 235) to Leonardtown), where current fiber resources are limited or non-existent. Also included in this request is the addition of geographically diverse control sites in Garrett County.

The Maryland FiRST system is composed of 22 cells, each with a single primary control site that is responsible for controlling and managing information for that specific cell, while also connecting that cell to the rest of the network. The addition of a second control site within each cell provides redundancy in the event the primary controlling site is disabled due to planned or unplanned events, reducing the risk of a large-scale radio coverage outage directly impacting operational users.

As mentioned in the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) analysis, DoIT is currently negotiating a follow-on maintenance contract with Motorola for the contract that expires in November 2025. Our expectation is the new proposed contract will be sent to the Board of Public Works (BPW) in the Spring of 2025 for approval. In the event this process is delayed, the contingency plan would be to extend the current contract by one or two (1-2) years. Though final costs have not been agreed to, executing the



Wes Moore | Governor
Aruna Miller | Lt. Governor
Katie Savage | Secretary

contingency plan should not accrue additional costs to the State during FY 2026.

As of July 1, 2024, the MD FiRST program had an unexpended balance of approximately \$35M from state appropriations from FY 2022 and earlier. To date, the unexpended balance has been reduced to \$17.5M. Of that balance, approximately \$16.8M is encumbered. It is our expectation that all unexpended funds from FY 2022 and prior will be encumbered or spent by the end of FY 2026. The closeout of the ethernet project later this year will not result in any unexpended funds.

DoIT thanks the Committee for its consideration for approval of the FY 2026 capital budget request.